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The EU's Regional Integration Policy towards Latin
America – State of the Art

Eva Scherwitz, University of Tübingen

The EU's regional integration policy towards Latin America - state of the art¹

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of how different authors see and evaluate the EU's promotion of regional integration in Latin America. Against this backdrop, the paper will provide an overview of the current state of the EU's regional integration approach towards Latin America; problems and challenges for this approach will be highlighted and possible further steps will be presented.

Studying the EU's promotion of regional integration implies the essential step of analyzing the 'state of the art'. In the following, I will therefore summarize how the literature assesses the EU's promotion of regional integration in Latin America (LA)²; how the EU strategy towards LA is conceptualized and evaluated.

1. General features of the EU's regional integration policy towards Latin America

The EU's intention of fostering regional integration in LA is generally expressed in the EU's engagement in a 'bi-regional cooperation approach' with subregional groups in LA (Schneider 2009). Hardacre and Smith (2009) – somewhat surprising – point out that the interregional relations of the EU with LA are most advanced in comparison to the EU's relations with Asia or Africa. The authors support this argument by saying that the EU-LA relationships consists of three *purely interregional relationships* with subregional groups in LA which are: the Central American Common Market (CACM), the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN). Each of these partnerships is dating from the mid-nineties and has first been driven by economic and finally also by political objectives from the EU side (Hardacre, Smith 2009). Both regions are furthermore linked via one trans-regional partnership: the Europe-Latin America Summit (EU-LAC), dating from 1999. This deep differentiation in terms of inter-regional relationships of the EU with

¹ Eva Scherwitz, Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, RegioConf project.

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² In the following text I refer to Latin America as a region, since this is the way it is conceptualized by the EU.

The literature I refer to has especially focused on the EU's relations with the sub-regions of Andean countries, Central America and Mercosur. These are the sub-regions which the EU also refers to at the European Union External Action homepage.

LA is appraised by the authors as unique and advanced in comparison to any other interregional relationship which the EU maintains (Hardacre, Smith 2009, p. 173).

1.1. Assessing the bilateral shift of the EU strategy

However, against this positive interregional backdrop, authors have lately observed a 'turnover' of this bi-regionally oriented approach of the EU (Schneider 2009, p. 2). The reason for this shift has been the lack of progress in concluding comprehensive association and strategic partnership agreements - including Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) - with the regional groups in LA (especially the stagnation of the free trade negotiations with Mercosur) (Schneider 2009; Hardacre, Smith 2009, p. 182).

The reason for this lack of progress is seen in the resistance of certain LA countries to meet free trade and liberalization demands of the EU (Schneider 2009; Arroyo Picard et al. 2009). This has led to an increased reorientation of the EU towards bilateral relations with individual LA countries (Schneider 2009; Arroyo Picard et al. 2009). Hardacre and Smith acknowledge that this development goes against the 'overarching regional integration strategy' of the EU (Hardacre, Smith 2009, p. 182), but see this as a consequence of a situation in which the EU lacks a 'truly coherent regional negotiating partner' (Hardacre, Smith 2009, p. 182).

The increasing bilateral orientation of the EU has been evaluated and interpreted differently in a number of studies. While for Schneider it constitutes a renunciation of the original EU approach, the author nevertheless finds it 'quite promising' (Schneider 2009, p. 2), given the recent stagnation of bi-regional negotiations. He furthermore underlines the eager interest of a number of LA countries in the bilateral strategic partnerships which the EU is offering (Schneider 2009, p. 2). Hardacre and Smith on the other hand see a certain dilemma of the EU's interregional approach in its drift to automatically opt for bilateral relationships as soon as negotiations with regional organizations in LA fail or stagnate in certain issues (Hardacre, Smith 2009, p. 182).

A much more critical assessment is offered by Arroyo Picard, Rodríguez and Castañeda Bustamante (2009). The authors see the bilateral shift of the EU approach as the expression of an EU which is merely pursuing economic trade-based interests in LA, generally following a logic of achieving global business aspirations. But it is not only this 'hypocrisy' (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 18) in the EU's regional integration approach which is highlighted in the authors' analysis.

The authors push their critique further by saying that the EU threatens to negotiate bilaterally if single countries of the LA subregional groups resist the EU's approach of negotiating FTAs. The authors argue that FTAs with the EU lead to a

'liberalisation of their [LA countries'] markets and services, the handing over of their intellectual property rights, provide for disproportionate protection for investments, and allow European transnational corporations to pillage natural resources' (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 8).

The EU thus made cooperation and political dialogue conditional on the opening of trade. The authors refer to a case of negotiations within the Andean Community: When Ecuador and Bolivia in 2008 refused to sign an FTA with the EU and proposed to negotiate political dialogue and cooperation separately, this was refused by the EU (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 16). The authors claim that thereby the EU is dividing subregional groupings in LA and is hindering regional integration processes (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, pp. 18f.). Consequently, the EU is in their view undermining the creation of an 'alternative integration approach' (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 47) which LA 'peoples' are seeking. This 'alternative' would imply a greater concentration on interregional trade (within LA subregions). Finally, the FTAs offered by the EU and their 'binding commitments' are seen as an obstacle for regional authorities in LA to implement regional development projects (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 47). The profit-seeking (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 47) attitude of the EU in negotiating FTAs with LA countries is thus seen as binding LA countries to practices which undermine their flexibility in achieving a differentiated and independent integration approach (Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 47). The latter is however seen as indispensable for LA countries in order to react in their way to the global financial crisis

1.2. The role of political goals

One question which is raised in several articles in this context is whether the design of interregional partnerships with LA subregions follows market goals (often seen as central for the US engagement in the region) or whether the EU is pursuing more political aims. Börzel and Risse emphasize that the EU pursues a quite regulatory and legalized approach in trade issues, but that the envisaged trade associations go along with political and technical cooperation efforts in different issue areas (Börzel, Risse 2009, p. 12). They furthermore claim that the EU's strategy towards LA does not include 'negative or positive conditionality' (Börzel, Risse 2009, p. 12). Bilal on the other hand speaks of the employment of conditions

by the EU in association agreements (FTAs included) with Central America and the Andean Community. The EU has made these agreements 'dependent on' the state of the regional (economic) integration in the referred LA subregions (Bilal 2005, p. 14).³

Concerning Mercosur, Sanchez-Bajo (1999) underlines in her assessment of the EU-Mercosur relationship that trade is just one of the pillars of the EU-Mercosur interaction. More important aspects, she is convinced, are political in nature. She underlines the lasting importance of the 'European model' for LA regional integration and points to the role of the EU's road map in modeling the LA institutional trajectory (Sanchez Bajo 1999, p. 938). This aspect will be discussed in detail in section 3 of this paper.

2. Credibility of the EU

A different general critique expressed in the literature concerns the 'credibility' of the EU and the legitimacy of the 'European model' for Latin American subregional groupings (Hardacre, Smith 2009; Arroyo Picard et al. 2009, p. 47). A revealing study concerning this subject comes from Freres and Sanahuja 2005. While the authors acknowledge that both the EU and LA face a kind of identity crisis and do not have 'consolidated' ideas of their roles as regions (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. vii), they also point out several shortcomings of the EU approach towards LA as a region. The reason for these shortcomings are seen in a lack of a consistent up-to-date strategy of the EU towards Latin America (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. 5). Following the authors, a new and convenient LA strategy of the EU should contain four general goals for the EU: (1) the contribution to development and social cohesion in LA; (2) the promotion of an autonomous regional foreign policy of LA; (3) a stronger presence of the EU in the region with the employment of clear interest as well as solidarity towards the region; (4) the Establishment of a strategic partnership with LA in order to cooperate in multilateral negotiations (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, pp. 5–6). The EU is thus expected to follow clear objectives and include non-trade components of integration in its regional integration strategy towards LA. In this context, the authors expect from the EU to pay 'closer attention to the link between integration, democratic governance, public policies and cooperative security' (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. viii). This goes along with the demand for a redirection of the EU's development aid in a more differentiated way in order to approach the problem of inequality in LA.

³ A similar point has been expressed by Arroyo Piccard et al. (2009) concerning the economic preconditions (e.g. conclusions of FTAs) which the EU requires, before engaging in other forms of interregional cooperation.

The socio-economic differences among LA states and the resulting difficulties for the projection of the EU's development aid are also taken up in a study by Gordillo (2007). He argues that the EU invests a lot of money in its aid for democracy; human rights etc. in LA, but lacks a general approach for the continent in terms of applying this aid in a way which takes into account the traditional cultures of LA countries. The money is thus simply transferred via interregional agreements with the existing regional groupings in LA or via bilateral agreements. While other authors have therefore deplored EU conditions, Gordillo criticizes transfers without specific conditions on how to use the money. In this context, it is criticized that the EU underestimates the factor of aggravating political cultures in those countries, such as 'patronage' and 'inefficiency' (Gordillo 2007, p. 198). In order to evade this problem, the author thus pledges for more efforts of the EU on effective institution building, rather than concentrating on the deployment of foreign aid. In his article on the EU – LA cooperation, Freres (2000) also refers to the 'donor position' of the EU and asks whether this can be interpreted as part of the EU's civilian power or rather as an instrument in order to achieve different underlying EU interests (trade and investment promotion) (Freres 2000, p. 64). Similar to the literature discussed so far, he asks for more coherence in the aid policy of the EU towards LA.

Another factor that contributes to the EU's credibility deficit are the shortcomings of the EU's strategic association project with LA, which had the - at least rhetorical - aim to lead to biregional association and 'has aroused excessive expectations' in LA (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. 4). However, Freres and Sanahuja (2005) point to a lack of coordination between the EU and member state bodies and to a lack of resources dedicated to the EU's aid policy, with both factors leading to a credibility deficit. The authors argue that in the perception of Latin American countries this deficit is reflected in an underestimation of the EU as 'principal' aid donor and in a growing concentration on single EU member states, which are more visible (Freres, Sanahuja 2005).

Given these perceived inconsistencies of the EU policy towards LA, the authors see the necessity for an increased mutual understanding between both sides. The authors argue that a better communication of EU goals via Commission officials would possibly strengthen the perception of a positive EU role for LA among LA countries. The notion of existing misperceptions between the partners is supported by interviews undertaken by the authors with actors on both sides. These show a clear disillusion among LA countries with respect to

the promotion of the 'European model' in LA: The European model remains doubtful for Latin American counterparts, the perception prevails that the EU lacks either willingness or the ability to share its model of integration (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. 45). In order to close this communication and perception gap between the partners, the authors demand a stronger presence of the EU in LA (Freres, Sanahuja 2005, p. viii). They further consider a clearer communication of EU goals and a better training of European Commission officials dealing with LA as indispensable.

3. Model EU

On the notion of the EU's model character, Bilal sees a two-way process of the EU impact on LA at play. On the one hand the EU has always pursued an ambitious regional integration agenda in LA, on the other hand regional integration has been the result of national leaders in LA and their efforts to emulate the EU model. The author holds that this project of copying the European model has failed. Although the institutional framework has been set up in the European way, the institutions of LA subregional groupings do not match the political reality in LA and the political implementation of the envisaged integration agenda of the EU (Bilal 2005). An example is the Andean Community with a level of integration which is seen too low by the EU Commission (Bilal 2005, p. 8). Others underline in contrast the lasting centrality of the EU model for Latin American regional integration (Sanchez Bajo 1999, p. 938).

Insights into the reasons for the problems that the emulation of the EU model has encountered in LA differ between regional groups and organizations. With regard to Mercosur, Matiaske et al. (2007) see the model character of the EU as questionable. After all they argue, in terms of democratic theory, Mercosur is more progressive in comparison to the EU e.g. in the way Mercosur has experienced 'deliberative citizen democracy at the local level' (Matiaske et al. 2007, p.5). The authors therefore pledge for an increased openness to mutual learning (Matiaske et al. 2007). In contrast, Lenz (2008) sees the intent of Latin American policy makers to undertake an emulation of the EU model behind the creation of Mercosur (Lenz 2008, p. 12). He situates this emulation in the context of a development in which the EU during the 1990s actively supported desires for 'regional institutionalization and regional market building' (Lenz 2008, p. 14) which were put forward by Latin American policy makers. In a second article dating from 2012, Lenz argues in a similar vein that the

development of Mercosur can be interpreted as the Latin American intent to replicate the EU integration process. The EU's active support of Mercosur 'as a bloc' and the 'technical assistance' of the EU has thus contributed to keeping this 'Mercosur ambition' going in the beginning (Lenz 2012: 162). The reason for a direct orientation and direction towards the EU model is explained by Latin American policy actors, who had become susceptible to the adoption of the EU model. The EU has in the case of Mercosur in addition actively fostered the formation of epistemic communities in favor of the EU model (Lenz 2012, p. 170).

In terms of the evaluation of such Latin American intent of emulation, Malamud (2012) speaks of the general failure of any Latin American attempts for regional integration (Malamud 2012, p. 177). He states this failure for all regional integration projects in LA. Following the interpretation of the author, Mercosur has 'neither deepened nor enlarged' and is far from being a common market (Malamud 2012, p. 177). With the EU as a reference point, Roy further points out that 'regional elites' have been signing treaties and have built up institutions without practical consequences (Roy 2012, p. 20), a problem also encountered in Asia and Africa.

4. Applying the EU model – the EU as an external federator?

In his study on the EU and interregional relations, Santánder (2005) focuses on the question whether interregional cooperation such as the one between the EU and Mercosur is able to consolidate regional groups and whether this gives the EU the role of an 'external federator' (Santander 2005). An instance of this EU effect as an external federator is seen in the fact that the EU signed the *Interregional Framework of Cooperation Agreement* with Mercosur in 1995, the first of its kind between two customs unions. Throughout the negotiations, the EU pushed for a Mercosur with its own legal status, since this was necessary in order to complete the Agreement. Santánder stresses that the prospect of entering an FTA with the EU and thus, of having access to the EU market, fostered the development of Mercosur decisively. He also points out that there was a request for cooperation with the EU 'on regional integration', since it was the aim of Mercosur to profit from the 'European experience' (Santander 2005, p. 294). Mercosur has been faced with a situation, in which it had to come to one common position and thus 'speak with a single voice' (Santander 2005, p. 302) in order to be able to talk to the EU. By demanding this kind of dialogue with Mercosur, the EU has thus acted as an 'external federator' of Mercosur (Santander 2005, p.

302). The author argues that the EU's strategies of demanding the positioning of Mercosur on policy fields which are not yet harmonized and of giving the perspective of ambitious Cooperation Agreements has produced a deepened and more credible cooperation among Mercosur countries (Santander 2005, p. 302).

The other important interregional cooperation of the EU in LA concerns the Andean Community. It was the first LA regional group to conclude a Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 1983 (Kanner 2005, p. 203). So far the cooperation has been focused on dialogues including the crucial issue of drugs and on the exchange of civil society groups. A deeper cooperation in terms of an Association Agreement has not been reached so far, but is negotiated (Kanner 2005, p. 203). Kanner points out that in these negotiations, the EU also addresses 'good governance' which is an important issue for the Andean Community and its prospects for regional integration. However, she criticizes that although good governance is mentioned in the 'EU-Andean Community Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement' several times, this notion lacks 'substance and clarity' (Kanner 2005, p. 213). Another point of the author is that the EU has admittedly been successful in improving the inclusion of civil society in the political deliberation process, however, the two principles the EU is seeking to achieve - 'participation and effectiveness' - need to be put forward more boldly and clearly by the EU towards the Andean Community (Kanner 2005, p. 213). She therefore demands more effectiveness and decisiveness on the side of the EU concerning the conclusion of the envisaged association agreement (Kanner 2005, p. 215).

5. The US as major competitor in the region

A final important pillar of the literature on the EU and its promotion of regional integration is the comparison of EU and US engagement in LA in terms of content and institution-building (Hardacre, Smith 2009; Grugel 2004).

The EU's approach on the promotion of regional integration in LA is thus contrasted with the one of the US (Grugel 2004). Hardacre and Smith argue that one central objective of the EU's regional integration approach in LA is economic balancing, especially in terms of competing with the US influence in the region (Hardacre, Smith 2009).

Grugel further underlines that while the US pursues a 'market-led pattern' of regional integration in LA, the EU is more political in its approach and concentrates on institution-

building (Grugel 2004, p. 608). Thus, the EU and the US both apply their own distinct new regionalism approach towards LA.⁴ The EU speaks of *inter-regionalism*⁵, which refers to equal but different partners. Thereby, Grugel argues that the EU uses its new inter-regionalism approach in order to set out what the EU believes to be a more 'humane' governance model in LA, one which is different from the one the US pursues (Grugel 2004, p. 621). For Grugel it bears some relevance that the EU uses the word 'partnership' when interacting with LA, which minimizes the inherent asymmetry of power relations between both regions (Grugel 2004, p. 607). This is contrasted with the US-Latin American relations, in which the US acts as the central state and takes the role of a hegemon.

A different observation of Grugel is that the EU is not able to impose its norms on LA and is not willing to take the related costs (Grugel 2004, p. 612), but at the same time, it nevertheless tries to achieve a shift in LA policy in a number of fields. The author even sees a challenge to US hegemony in the fact that the EU gives its aid to Latin American social actors and strengthens its cooperation with civil society actors.

6. Conclusions

Although the relations with LA are most advanced, the literature has observed a turning point in the EU-LA relationship in which the EU has lately been inclined towards a more bilateral approach towards single LA countries. Reservations towards the EU approach on regional integration in LA come from different angles. The trade orientation of the EU is seen by some authors as hindering a possibly alternative integration approach by LA countries. Generally, a demand for the inclusion of non-trade issues into a clear EU strategy of fostering regional integration is requested in several writings. This approach should respect regional LA cultures and should itself be consistent. The existing perception gap between both regions should further be closed by enhancing the EU presence in the region. The EU should in the view of several authors on the one hand communicate its policy for the region, on the other hand, it should listen to and take into consideration differentiated demands and existing inequalities within the LA region.

⁴ *New regionalism* in the definition of Grugel refers to the kind of activities which actors pursue in order to develop 'conscious policies of integration with other states' Grugel 2004, p. 604.

⁵ *New inter-regionalism* includes political goals, such as 'institutional reform, social inclusion and (...) discursive mediation of power inequalities between Europe and the South' Grugel 2004, p. 608 - Here, this is understood as the EU's accentuation of 'welfare, human rights, democracy and dialogue' and 'economic liberalization' Grugel 2004, p. 619.

Concerning the role of the EU as a model for LA, the literature depicts a two-way process of the EU: On the one side the EU actively promotes its model of regional integration (supply side) and LA countries are on the other side interested in the emulation of the EU model. However, this process of emulation is seen as a failure by most authors. Reasons for this are seen in institutional shortcomings since 'emulated' regional institutions in LA are not seen as suitable for the political reality in LA. Another challenge lies in the lack of the implementation of the EU agenda of regional integration. The EU however seems to have been successful in influencing civil society and especially in fostering the formation of regional epistemic communities in favor of the EU. This element may even be an important factor when it comes to convincing LA states that the EU approach of governance in LA represents a more 'humane' and agreeable approach than the one applied by the US.

6.1. General Research implications for the RegioConf project and further questions to be considered

- The text has shown several contradictory perceptions of the different authors for the rather disillusioning development of regional organizations in Latin America. Is it the failure of a Latin American idealism in adapting the EU model, or is it the EU's fault of having tried too hard to impose its own integration model?
- Furthermore, the perceived new EU direction towards a more bilateral focus of EU-LA relations...does it stem from deficits in regional (economic) integration processes in LA which gave the EU no other possible alternative than to negotiate bilaterally, or is this development rather an expression of the EU's greedy attempt to profit from trade relations at any price, even if this hinders regional integration in Latin America.
- To what extent has the EU's "trade focus" (if it exists) aggravated conflicts among LA countries? Has this economic focus backfired in terms of credibility in the face of the EU crisis?
- Are political goals behind the trade negotiations of the EU with LA? Do the EU's conditions inscribed in the trade agreements help further political integration, is the EU reluctant to negotiate with countries only pursuing political cooperation (without free trade)? Would conflict resolution be a condition which has been/could be inscribed in bioregional agreements?

- To what extent does explicit support for regional institutions may facilitate conflict transformation?
- Do regional conflicts play at all a role in the process of regional integration in LA?
- Has the inclusion of development cooperation with the Andean Community had any effect on the Honduras conflict?

6.2. Role of LA regional organizations and implications for further research

The following table summarizes the findings on specific LA regional organizations.

Implications for further research on the role of LA regional organizations are subsequently discussed.

Summary on focus in reviewed literature regarding regional organizations

	core development	factor EU generally: inter-regionalism at eyelevel	local actors	external actors	role of conflicts
CACM	- No evaluation in the reviewed literature, but qualified as important interreg. relationship	- association agreements with conditions on RI - EU supports stronger economic integration		(for all reg. organizations) - US different approach than EU, market-led pattern of regional integration (> EU strives for more 'humane governance model in the region)	- Not mentioned by authors
Mercosur	Not very successful, stagnation in trade negotiations, but promising political cooperation? - institutional setting designed after EU	- EU as model for institutional trajectory ; offers technical assistance - negotiations with Mercosur as a bloc → identity building, external federator EU - support of epistemic communities in favor of EU - EU concludes association agreements with conditions	- epistemic communities in favor of adoption of EU model - LA leaders/policy-makers want emulation of EU - Brazil as local hegemon in Mercosur	- US as hegemon, central power for LA	- Not mentioned by authors

		on RI - stagnation of Mercosur develop. (due to EU's emphasis on economic integration?)			
CAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First regional cooperation agreement with EU - 'EU-Andean Community Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement' includes good governance notion - too low level of RI - strong differences between participating countries (e.g. withdrawal of Venezuela) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - civil society included in EU-CAN negotiations, but not decisively -not enough participation of social actors In CAN - civil society plays a larger, yet a too little role within the CAN countries 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EU does not respond to wish of Bolivia and Ecuador for political cooperation (without FTA)→ therebyEU hindering regional integration of Andean countries ? - EU (FTA oriented) undermines flexibility of CAN for achieving a differentiated and independent integration approach?

Generally, the reviewed literature on the EU's approach towards regional integration has made more global claims on trends of regional integration in LA. The EU approach towards single regional organizations are rarely analyzed in depth.

As we can see in this summarizing table, the reviewed literature has concentrated on instances of rather defective examples of regional organizations in Latin America. RegioConf should therefore also consider the (functioning) regional processes in Central America. The literature is rather short in terms of precise information on the role of local actors. In terms of third actors, only a few general statements are made concerning the role of the other central actors for these regional groupings, namely the US.

Here, the RegioConf project can obviously help to fill a gap in taking into consideration the supply (EU) side and the demand side (local) and the interaction of the EU with third actors.

Last but not least, the most obvious gap in the reviewed literature concerns the apparent neglect of the link of regional integration and regional conflicts. This raises important questions for the project purpose:

Is this link overtly established by the EU? Why does it not appear in the literature then? If not, have there been instances of (unintended) effects of regional organizations in LA on conflict transformation?

All these questions will be at the center of future RegioConf research.

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