ASPA: Challenges and Opportunities of South-South Cooperation.

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Introduction

Since the 20th century due to the changes occurred in the International System, States have been forced in a certain way to make alliances of different kinds such as UN, ITRA, IMF, to face the challenges that have been presented in the global scenario, and to guarantee the growth of States. They began to lay the basis for integration around the world, while the League of Arab States was created in 1945, organizations that serve as background for Mercosur, and indirectly for UNASUR begin to take shape from the ‘60’s, such as LAFTA, ALADI and the Andean Pact.

Integration today exceeds the merely economic aspects as was in a moment, it concerns about creating a true identity. The Arab world carries more than half a century forging a unit. This idea has been gestating in Latin America for over a hundred years, but it is with the recent creation of UNASUR that is really seen a regional possibility. The union of these two diverse regions presents potential in many ways, since they have historical situations, objectives and ideals in common. Even if ASPA is relatively new it has awaken commercial interest. After 9/11 the oil monarchies stopped investing in the United States, which turned out extremely beneficial for Brazil, who could receive new investments and would have the chance to bridge the gap in leadership level.

United States and Israel have maintained skeptical about this new fora, each one for their own reasons. In the Israeli case, they feared that South American countries would support the Palestine cause. After the visit from chancellor Amorim in 2004 this idea was discarded, when it was stated that it was a summit of “dialogue and hope” and it would be used according to the peace, dialogue and understanding objectives among all the people. On the other hand, United States base their fear in the fact that a meeting involving more than 30 countries could be constituted as an autonomous political block, as well as the concern expressed at the summit by the sanctions taken by the United States in Syria, with the so-called “Syria Accountability Act”

The intention of this paper is to demonstrate the role that dissimilarity of interests and persistence of conflicts play domestically in each region, and if they really entail the biggest obstacle for achieving unified action plans that allow the fulfillment of the objectives posed by the fora. This will be done through the explanation of the functioning and evolution of ASPA since its creation, the measures of the Arab world to face the challenges that have been presented in the global scenario, and to guarantee the growth of States. They began to lay the basis for integration around the world, while the League of Arab States was created in 1945, organizations that serve as background for Mercosur, and indirectly for UNASUR begin to take shape from the ‘60’s, such as LAFTA, ALADI and the Andean Pact.

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3 Interview between the Foreign Relations Minister of Brazil, Celso Amorim and the General Secretary of the League of Arab States, Amre Moussa. Op. Cit
taken in the Summits, and its organic structure. It will be analyzed the role of the fora in terms of domestic and international problematic of the countries, as well as the measures taken in the declarations, which will show the true multifocal character of the block, and how this affects the States’ policies.

Regarding South America a brief historical review will be made, in terms of the integration processes it’s had, which helps to understand the recent multiregionalism in the area. This will be done taking into consideration the factors that lead to integration.

The paper shall be initiated based on the concept of cooperation as the collaboration with others for the attainment of an end; and integration understood as specific process of unification, politically or economically, and the subsequent creation of institutions and communities. From this, it can be seen that the current world configuration has narrowed the scope of action of States in the International System. Latin-American countries can hardly achieve a global insertion policy without alliances, so they can counterbalance the powerful countries. In this way authors like Russell and Tokatlian have raised of concept of relational autonomy meant for these countries to have more possibilities to succeed in the global scenario.

Relational autonomy is defined as the capacity and disposition of a country to make decisions with others by their own will and jointly deal with situations and processes occurred both within and beyond its borders. It also refers to the condition and capacity of a state of act independently and in cooperation with others, in a competent, committed and responsible way.

As a practice relational autonomy requires crescent interaction, negotiation and active participation in the making of international rules and laws, tending to ease global governance. Autonomy is no longer defined by the capability of a country to isolate and control external processes and events, it is now defined by its power to participate and influence in global issues, especially in organizations and international regimes.

In this way the concept is perceived as a necessary condition, to preserve and increase the well-being and security of these countries. The authors mention that it has to be considered as co-constitutive of the other objective national interests, and it should not be considered exclusively in terms of foreign policy. It should be practiced from a perspective in which the NSAs play an increasingly important role in the determination of contemporary international issues. These NSAs can position strategically in the International System through this concept of autonomy. They can generate scenarios and situations to their own convenience, by understanding the relations of dominations and subordination in the practices of power policy.

**Historical Regionalism**

Taking into account the subcontinent’s history in terms of integration and the achieved results until this moment, there has been a list of projects and initiatives which were unable to adapt to a globalized and changing international system. This results in ideals that have not been put into practice, damaging the South America’s image, and showing it as a continuous tug of war.

South America has had an extensive history, although hampered and slightly fruitful in terms of regional integration, and has not been able to overcome the challenges that were presented both

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5 Ibídem.
domestically and internationally. Added to the lack of recognition of Brazil as a regional leader this situation has lead to the failure of numerous organizations and associations, among them, LAFTA, ALADI, Rio Group, and the double standard regarding MERCOSUR.

Analyzing the case of the Rio Group⁶ it can be seen that there is inconsistency between the topics posed in the documents of the summits, and the policies carried forward by their members, mainly among South America. The ⁸th item in the Santiago Summit the commitment to strengthen the Inter-American System of Human Rights Protection is reaffirmed, but in reality only Brazil, Chile and Colombia have ratified the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance. On the other hand the Protocol of the American Convention on Human Rights to Abolish the Death Penalty has only been ratified by Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela. And in the case of The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court the South-American states that ratified were Argentina, Paraguay and Venezuela. These are some of the examples of the duality presented in political praxis in terms of declarations of the Rio Group and the actions taken by its members. This kind of actions show a lack of commitment by the States, and this situation is reflected in the functioning of the organizations they belong to.

The members of Rio Group have gone through periods of democratic instability, corruption and inefficient governance. While these regimes have democratic governments which have electoral legitimacy, are subdued to interests and lack public ethics, have a high concentration of power. It was expected that political result was a failure.

Mercosur is composed by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay –currently suspended for the violation of the Democratic Clause of the Ushuaia Protocol⁷ Uruguay and Venezuela. Bolivia signed its adhesion in December 2012 but has not been ratified by the other members. The associate countries are Chile, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. As antecedent of UNASUR and consequently of ASPA, it can be said that Mercosur presents some dualism.

As its name implies, Mercosur would be a common market, but this does not apply to reality, since it never came to fruition as such. It functions as a customs union, although like a hampered one because it lacks full movement of all factors of production between member countries, and there are still products on which a common external tariff is non-existent; features necessary to speak of a true customs union. These are challenges for the block and for all its members, who have been unable to carry out the provisions of the Asuncion Treaty in 1991.

History of integration in South America and the Arab World

⁶Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, CARICOM, Center America, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Belice, Guyana, Cuba, Jamaica y Suriname

⁷Ushuaia Protocol, Diplomatic Clause, Article 4. If interruption of the democratic order in a State Party to this Protocol, other States Parties shall promote appropriate consultations among themselves and with the affected State. Article 5. When the consultations mentioned in the previous article prove unsuccessful, the other States Parties to this Protocol, as applicable in accordance with the agreements existing integration between them, consider the nature and scope of the measures to be applied, taking into account the seriousness of the situation. These measures will range from suspension of the right to participate in the various organs of the respective integration processes, to the suspension of the rights and obligations arising from these processes. Ushuaia Protocol of July 24, 1998: Available in http://www.amersur.org.ar/Integ/ProtocoloUshuaia.htm. (accessed April 20, 2013)
The League of Arab States was founded in 1945, and has its headquarters in Cairo. It is composed
by 22 countries, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia,
Kuwait, Jordan, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Mauritania, Somalia,
Palestine, Djibouti, and Comoros. Its purposes are:

"(...) Serve the common good of all Arab countries, ensure better conditions for all Arab
countries, guarantee the future of all Arab countries and fulfill the wishes and expectations of
all Arab countries".8

Among the implicit objectives we can highlight the liberation and unit of the Arab world; cooperation
both economically and financially, communications, intellect, nationality, sanitary (art. 2) collective
security in case of aggression or threat (art.6) and the prohibition to use force (art.5) as well as the
obligation to respect different political regimes.9

UNASUR is an international organization created in 2008 as an impulse towards regional
integration in terms of energy, education, health, environment, infrastructure, security and
democracy. It is composed by 12 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador,
Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela. All the actions taken by UNASUR
are headed to building a regional identity, based in their shared history and under the principles of
multilateralism, international law, and respect of human rights and democratic processes.

**Functioning of the Fora**

ASPA came to reality in 2005 with its first summit in Brasilia. In that opportunity they stated that the
pursue of sustainable development, justice and international peace, commitment to multilateralism,
respect to international law and the UN charter and the observance of human rights would be their
objectives. Until 2009 ASPA functioned without a permanent structure, this translated in a lack of
credibility, since it is difficult to accept measures taken by an organization that worked 4 years with
no organs. This made it complicated to take action plans that were a result of the summits. A clear
example is that between the first two summits there was a period of four years, and it is because
there was no schedule regarding meetings. Only in 2009, with the Doha Declaration it is established
that meetings will take place once every three years, the result was the 2012 summit in Lima, Peru.
The organic structure of ASPA is also established in the Doha Declaration, so that they can
continue with the dynamic process, and to be able to guarantee the follow up of the measures taken
during the meetings.

- Summit: It’s the most important organ; it is composed by the Heads of State and
  Government of the 34 countries that integrate ASPA. Their meetings take place once every
  three years.
- Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs: They meet every two years.
- Council of High Officers of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs: it is composed by the national
  coordinators. They meet once every six months.
- Sectoral Committees: Composed by experts of each theme area. They must meet at least
twice a year.
- Group of Executive Coordination Formed by the General Secretary of the League of Arab
  States and the President of UNASUR. They must meet twice a year.

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8Preamble of the Treaty establishing the League of Arab States signed in 1945. Available
It was previously established that ASPA is a multifocal fora, which means it has numerous areas of interest. This allows a better approach between the regions, considering that the problematic of the International System are quite diverse, and go from economics, to environment, culture and education. In the declarations of the Summits of Heads of State and Government have been dictated resolutions, measures and conclusions regarding each one of these topics.

One feature to note in regard of this issue is the initiative of the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Ibn Abdellaziz Al-Saud to promote dialogue between religions, creeds and cultures of the world by the “Calling of the Mecca for dialogue among religions” on June 6th 2008, and the high level meeting of the General Assembly of UN in November 2008. After these and other initiatives the result was in the subscription of the agreement established by the King Abdullah Ibn Abdellaziz Al-Saud Global Centre for dialogue between religion and culture believers in Vienna, on October 13th, 2011.

It is further recognized the indispensable character of quality education to become a human right representing a key factor to social change, sustainable development and the fulfillment of essential responsibilities. It is known that primary education supposes the base of society's growth, and it should be understood as such by the States in order to achieve a higher quality of life. Within this area they seek to promote academic and professional exchange, and technical cooperation between individuals of the countries that compose the block. In addition, it is noted the creation of “Bibliaspa” as a research centre, and South-American and Arab library of cultural and academic promotion.

In the ambit of environment an Understanding Memorandum was elaborated among the member countries in terms of technical, scientific, technological and innovational cooperation in the areas of climate change and desertification. This legal instrument has the object to develop Technical Cooperation projects between the Arabic and South-American Worlds and to establish the parameters for its further execution.

There are also innovations in terms of social cooperation; there has been a meaningful step forward in the implication of the role of women, who are achieving a leading role in an international level in terms of political, social and economical spheres. To further strengthening of this trend it is created a fora in which take part women in important government positions including parliament members and can also participate leader women from the civil society and the academic world. It is known as the “International Leader Women Fora”. Its first meeting was held in the city of Lima in April 2014. This is a novelty, it would have been impossible to think this would happen a few years ago, taking into consideration the role women have had in the Arab World, based in cultural and historical experiences.

**Role of ASPA in member’s problematic.**

As it was previously established the block shows a strong interest in attempting to solve the crisis and problems that States go through, whether it is by making recommendations, coming up with plans of action or adopting initiatives to improve the situation that every one of the States is going through. It chases the same purposes as planted in the UN Charter, and seek to diminish the current asymmetries in the global system.

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12. A) Maintain peace and security, and to that end: to take effective measures to prevent and remove threats to peace collective action, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace; and bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, international situations which might lead to a breach of the peace; B) Promote among nations friendly relations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.) To achieve international cooperation in solving problems international economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for
ASPA has taken controversial measures in this area as it was previously mentioned the fact they denied the United State’s request to be an observer. It can be noted the commitment to its members in terms of situations that have an effect in institutional and democratic stability mainly in the Arab World. This situation is reflected in the Lima Declaration since one of the most expensive topics is destined to “Political Coordination” making reference to the bonds of solidarity and cooperation of the States.

As an example of these measures we can quote the fact to urge Israel to immediately retreat of all the Arab territories occupied in June 1967, included the Syrian Golan and what was left of Lebanese territories, and to dismantle all settlements, as well as those in East Jerusalem. It has also been reaffirmed that all unilateral measures adopted by Israel in East Jerusalem are invalid while it has taken due account the advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice on the "Legal Consequences of the construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ", and urge all parties concerned to abide by such advisory opinion regarding the legal obligations.\textsuperscript{13}

On the other hand Israel’s military attack against merchant ships that transported humanitarian aid to Gaza has been condemned. It caused civil victims in violation to International Law that protects free navigation, and international agreements, the principles of humanitarian law. Those violations make it difficult to peacefully solve the conflicts in Middle East.

In the American continent, the block has called Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to resume negotiations to find as soon as possible a peaceful solution to the so called “Falkland Issue” in accordance with the relevant resolutions of UN. In the same way the fora has reiterated that the claim to consider Falkland, Southern Georgias, and Southern Sandwich Islands as countries and territories that can be applied to Part Four of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and decisions of the European Union on the Overseas Association is unhappy with the fact that a sovereignty dispute over the islands exists.

In this way has been declared that all unilateral activities of non renewable resource exploration taken in the Argentinean continental platform around Falkland are incompatible with the dispositions of the 31/49 Resolution of the General Assembly of UN. The United Kingdom has also been asked to abstain to conduct military drills in the territories ongoing sovereignty controversy recognized by the UN.\textsuperscript{14}

On the other hand the same block has condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and has rejected every entailment between terrorism and a certain people, religion, ethnicity or culture. Stress the importance of combating terrorism through active and effective international cooperation within the United Nations and regional organizations, based on respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with International Law, International Humanitarian law, International Refugee Law, rules, conventions and other human rights instruments. It has also reaffirmed the importance of enhanced cooperation and coordination in the exchange of information and knowledge and the development of competent bodies specialized in combating terrorism calling for the holding of an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations in order to study this phenomenon and to define the crime of terrorism, calling for the convening of an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to study this phenomenon and to define the crime of terrorism. It has also been discouraged ransom to terrorists, be they individuals, groups or organizations and welcome the signing of the agreement for the establishment of the International Center for Combating Terrorism

human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion D) be a center for harmonizing efforts of nations in attaining these ends. UN Charter, available at https://www.un.org/spanish/aboutun/charter.htm#Cap1 (accessed on March 30, 2013)

\textsuperscript{13} Article 2, Subsection 1. Lima Declaration. Op.
sponsored by the United Nations in response to the proposal of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Ibn Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, presented at the International Conference on Combating Terrorism - Riad 2005, which was signed at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York 19 September 2011 in order to support international cooperation to combat this phenomenon in order to remove it, and ask the summit to cooperate with the center.  

The role of ASPA in the International Food Shortage Crisis

Currently the world is immersed in a context of international food crisis. This is due to the effect of extreme temperature, prolonged droughts, devastating floods, bad crops and even the increase of human consumption. The values have been decreasing for six consecutive months, but in February 2013 the food Index Prices of the World Bank was inferior in only 9% to the maximum, registered in August 2012.

This means that despite sustained lows, international prices of food are still high, and they remain close to their historical peak. According to a report done by FAO about “The World Condition of Food and Agriculture” reveals certain conclusions, one of them is quoted next:

"(...) Investment in agriculture is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and hunger and promoting sustainability strategies, since the regions where the agricultural capital per worker and the public expenditure on agriculture per worker have stagnated or declined over the past three decades are also epicenters of poverty and hunger in the world today.”

In the Lima Declaration can be observed how the member countries of ASPA show their concerns about this problem and urge to:

"(...) assert, based on the common goal of fighting hunger and malnutrition, it is important regional and intra-regional cooperation for the implementation of public policies to ensure food and nutrition security in a sustainable manner.”

Following the report by FAO, they promote family food production, the transmission of science, agriculture and technology in raising livestock to the end of increasing both production and productivity.

From Saudi Arabia the of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdul Aziz Al Saud Abdullah bin decided to invest in the agricultural sector with the purpose of aiding the developing countries in internal investment infrastructure development, providing incentives to the sustainable use of soil and water resources, extending the areas of host countries and to ensure food security of the population taking into account both national and international laws and rules.  

To take action in the sense of cooperation, ASPA members agree to establish an ad-hoc subcommittee for the purpose of addressing agricultural cooperation and transfer of technologies for sustainable food production.

This initiative of South-South economic cooperation shows complementarities due we locate the League of Arab States where most of the countries are oil exporters, and importers of food, while the South American Countries is the other way around. In this way the principles of International Commerce apply to pursue the maximum of mutual benefits and to exploit the potential of each country, ASPA provides the tools and support to achieve it.

In practical situations since the first Summit in 2005 it has been registered a notable increase of transactions between both regions, there has also been new Free Trade Agreements and Treaties, as in 2010 between Mercosur and Egypt, constituting a worthy opportunity for South America to position as the biggest wheat importer. Recently in 2011 in Montevideo took place the signing of a Free Trade Treaty between Mercosur and Palestine, also predictably keeps Framework Agreements with the Kingdom of Jordan, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic.19

**Tentative Conclusions.**

After extensive research and a detailed analysis of the factors involved in ASPA’s modus operandi it can be appreciated that in the few years it has, there has been major progress, in terms of foreign policy and in the particular situation of each of the members in many aspects. The inflection points that were seen as a threat to the functioning of ASPA such as the situation of under development, economical asymmetries’, social problems, internal instability; proved to be the base of the consolidation of an alliance to achieve a true reciprocate and solidarity relationship.

The role that the international System gave them allowed an approach and then identification between peers for the sake of showing their true potential. The states were able to get the necessary support and to jointly look for solutions. They proved something that seemed impossible, the union of the “weak of the South” can effectively bring results that appeared to be unreachable due to lack of trust placed in them by the International System. Despite the obstacles and challenges, ASPA resulted as a great opportunity as a way out of the periphery, to set the basis for a change of the structure of international power and the viability of true South-South Cooperation.

They are two worlds united by situations, ideals, values, and the longing of overcoming underdevelopment, and separated by nothing more that geographic distance. It is possible to talk about true bonds among men with a common end. An end that dates back before the rise of nation states

"Those who wish to attain oneness must practice virtue without distinction must dissolve all ideas of duality: good and bad, beautiful and ugly, high and low. They will be obliged to abandon any mental deviation born of cultural or religious beliefs"

Lao-Tsé

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