

Neopresidentialism and the hierarchy of power in Latin American Integration: UNASUR as a case study*

Neopresidencialismo y jerarquía de poder en la integración latinoamericana: UNASUR como caso de estudio

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ABSTRACT

The process of building Latin American autonomy through regional integration has lost its momentum in recent years and in some cases, are seriously questioned. The hypothesis put forward here is that Latin American neopresidentialism is replicated in regional institutions configurating an essentially intergovernmental integration model which, combined with the logic of the hierarchy of power in the international order, ends up giving privileges to the most powerful countries. Thus, the agendas promoted from the regional and subregional Latin American organizations are those that interest the countries that are better positioned in the international structure and possess greater capacities to implement the agreements. Taking the “Unión de Naciones Suramericanas” (UNASUR) as a case study, is possible to

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corroborate that neopresidentialism and the hierarchy of power have conditioned the institutionality and agenda of this organization, placing the political ideology of the presidents and national interests above the regional interests.

Keywords: Latin American Regional Integration – UNASUR – Neopresidentialism – International Hierarchy – Intergovernmentalism – National Power.

RESUMEN

El proceso de construcción de la autonomía latinoamericana a través de la integración regional ha perdido impulso en los últimos años y, en algunos casos, se encuentra seriamente cuestionado. La hipótesis presentada aquí es que el neopresidencialismo latinoamericano se replica en las instituciones regionales, configurando un modelo de integración esencialmente intergubernamental que, combinado con las lógicas de la jerarquía de poder en el orden internacional, termina dando privilegios a los países más poderosos. De esta forma, las agendas que se promueven desde las organizaciones regionales y subregionales latinoamericanas son aquellas que interesan a los países que están mejor posicionados en la estructura internacional y poseen mayores capacidades para implementar los acuerdos. Tomando la Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR) como un caso de estudio, es posible corroborar que el neopresidencialismo y la jerarquía de poder han condicionado la institución y la agenda de esta organización, colocando la ideología política de los presidentes y los intereses nacionales por encima de los intereses regionales.

Palabras clave: Integración Regional Latinoamericana – UNASUR – Neopresidencialismo – Jerarquía Internacional – Intergubernamentalismo – Poder Nacional.

INTRODUCTION

The expression of neopresidentialism has in common with the US presidentialism only the name, since in its form it is more similar to the democratic constitutionality with a strict hierarchy in the structure of political power that was configured in the first years of Napoleon Bonaparte's regime. In that sense, neopresidentialism, according to Karl Loewenstein, "is fundamentally authoritarian by virtue of the exclusion of the recipients of power from an effective participation in the formation of the state will; [...] it does not do without a parliament, cabinet and formally independent courts; however, these institutions are strictly subject to the head of the State in the hierarchy of the conformation of power (Loewenstein, 1979, p. 85). In a premonitory manner for the Latin American political systems of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Loewenstein would notice that neopresidentialism usually manifests itself during the process of the transition from autocracy to authentic democracy.

Indeed, during the last decades the Latin American States have distinguished themselves, in internal politics, by the concentration of power around the head of the Executive (Lanzaro, 2001; Carpizo, 2006; Alcántara, Barragán, & Sánchez, 2016; Hurtado, 2001, pp. 15–65) and, in foreign policy, by the differentiated weight between social actors and governmental agents,

highlighting the marginal participation of civil society in foreign policy. This monopoly of the Latin American presidents in affairs of foreign policy is enshrined in the institutionality of the regional integration organizations (Jenne, Schenoni, & Urdinez, 2017; Baracaldo & Chenou, 2019) and, for the case study presented here, in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, for its acronym in Spanish).

As part of the institutional bodies established by UNASUR, the most important of these is the Council of Heads of State and Government (CJEG, for its acronym in Spanish). As its name indicates, it is made up of the highest authorities of each of the member states (holders of executive power). The CJEG has been endowed with a *Pro Tempore* Presidency (PTP) that is exercised successively by each of the member states, in alphabetical order, for annual periods. It is possible to point out that the PTP, supported by the General Secretariat, marks the pulse of South American integration, since among its functions are those of preparing and presiding over the meetings of UNASUR bodies, presenting the annual program of activities, representing UNASUR in international events and signing statements with third parties.

The hypothesis put forward here is that Latin American neopresidentialism, with its specificities of concentration of power in decision-making

at the national level, is replicated in regional institutions in two senses: on one hand, presidents self-constitute as the highest level of management of integration, without their decisions being subject to supranational checks and balances mechanisms; on the other hand, they replicate the logic of national neopresidentialism by installing a *Pro Tempore* Presidency, a kind of “presidency of the presidencies”, which becomes the organ that marks the pulse of the integrating process. The absence of mechanisms that exercise some type of checks and balances on the decisions of the presidents at the regional level, configures an essentially intergovernmental integration model which (Mijares & Nolte, 2018, p. 106),

combined with the logic of hierarchy of power in the international order, ends privileging to the most powerful countries, in such a way that the topics of the agenda that are promoted from the intergovernmental regional institutions are those that interest the countries that are better positioned in the international structure and possess greater capacities to implement the agreements.

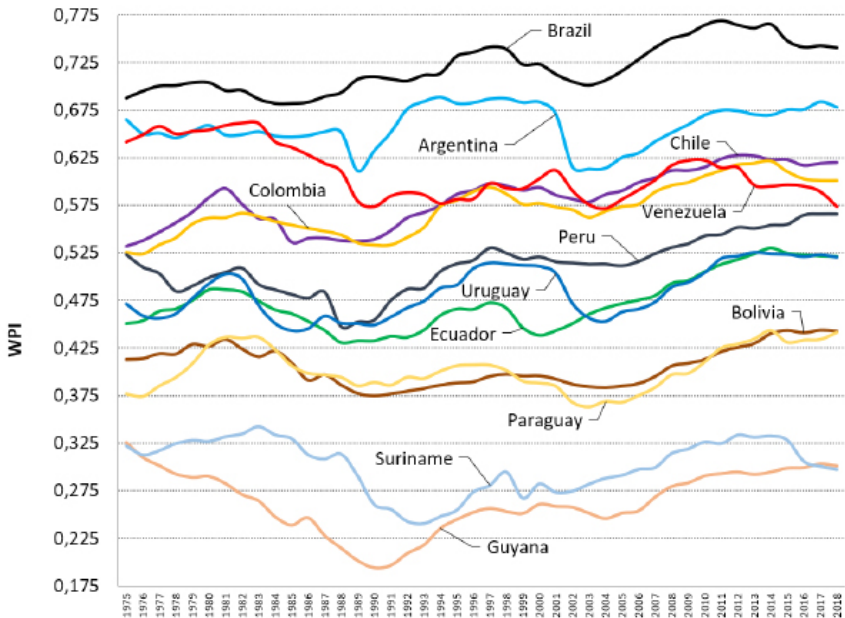
The purpose of this document is to examine the role of Latin American presidents in regional integration, taking UNASUR as a case study. To do this, it will review all the PTPs from the UNASUR’s foundation in 2008 until its suspension in 2019.

I. THE HIERARCHY OF POWER IN SOUTH AMERICA

The starting point is that the scope and maneuvering of the Latin American presidents is conditioned by the national power endowment existing in the State that each one governs. In that sense, the theoretical-methodological basis starts from the works “El sistema latinoamericano de naciones: un análisis estructural” (Galtung, Mora, & Schwartzman, 1966), “International Structure and International Integration: the case of Latin America” (Reinton, 1967), and “Las promesas

del ascenso estructural de los países de América Latina y el Caribe” (Morales & Rocha, 2015), that complement each other in their efforts to determine the hierarchy of power in Latin America. Continuing with the perspective drawn in the last work mentioned, the World Power Index (WPI)¹ prefigures the South American hierarchy of power in the following way:

Graph 1. World Power Index for countries of South America, 1975-2018



Own elaboration. Source: www.worldpowerindex.com

With the greatest endowment of power in South America, Brazil and

Argentina are placed highest: Brazil is a consolidated regional power (Nolte, 2006; Soares de Lima & Hirst, 2006; Gomes, 2012), while Argentina is in the process of re-emergence as a regional power (Miranda, 2011; Bueno, 2016).

1 World Power Index (WPI) is defined as the numeric expression which calculates the accumulation of national capacities that a State possesses to exercise its power in the international system (Rocha & Morales, 2018). WPI is integrated with three sub-indexes -the Material Capacities Index (MCI), the Semi-Material Capacities Index (SMCI) and the Immaterial Capacities Index (IMCI) - which measure specific dimensions of national power. The main critique to the WPI is that it considers relatively few indicators (18 in total); however, its strength lies in that it raises a multidimensional vision of power, accumulates data for 4 decades (from 1975 to 2017) and presents the measurements for more than 175 countries, that is, for almost all countries.

Afterwards is, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela. These three countries occupy a high structural position, but lower than the previous one: Chile can be characterized as a secondary regional State (Wehner, 2015; Morales, 2020), that is to say, a State structurally placed in the lower part of the semi-periphery without the material capacities to compete with the regional powers; while Colombia and

Venezuela are two subregional powers (Morales, Rocha, & Durán, 2016; Tzili, 2017; Iñiguez-Torres, 2017). These three countries are key players in the definition, construction, and governance of South America.

In an intermediate position of the graph are Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay. Although this group has not achieved a structural position as outstanding as the previous ones, these three have been substantially improving their national power in the last decade, a fact that makes them relevant actors in the context of South America.

Below, two countries are distinguished by their smaller amount of national power. Bolivia and Paraguay lack material capacities, but also semi-material and immaterial capacities. All this means that their contribution to the integration process can

be significant, but it has a lesser impact and durability than all the previous countries.

In the lower part of the hierarchy of power in South America it is possible to find two countries with very small national capacities: Suriname and Guyana. Their remarkably low levels of national power limit their leadership, possibilities for maneuvering and contributions to regional integration.

In summary, Brazil and Argentina are precisely the mainstays of South American integration, with a notable preponderance of the former (Scheboni & Actis, 2014; Giaever & Schofield, 2016); but also, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela are decisive actors that can either promote the process or, failing that, hinder it (as has happened in recent years due to the crisis with Caracas).

II. ANALYSIS OF UNASUR PRESIDENCIES PRO TEMPORE: 2008–2019

As stated above, the topics of the agenda that are promoted from the regional integration are according to the interest and capacities the countries that are better positioned in the international structure. To understand the dynamics of UNASUR, from this structural perspective, the actions and main achievements of each South American country will be analyzed during its Pro Tempore Presidency in the following section.

1. Presidency of Chile: May 23, 2008–August 10, 2009

On May 23, 2008, UNASUR was founded in the city of Brasilia. In an extraordinary session, the South American leaders, accompanied by their Ministers of Foreign Affairs and their respective delegates, signed the Constitutive Treaty of UNASUR. From this day to August 10, 2009, the first official PTP of the UNASUR will fall to the Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, who will

have to manage several institutional problems, the most important being the resignation of the individual who should have become the first Secretary General of UNASUR.

1.1. Resignation of Rodrigo Borja to the position of General Secretary

The first problem that the PTP had to face was the resignation of the candidate to head the General Secretariat. Rodrigo Borja, who was president of Ecuador from 1988 to 1992, was nominated by Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa to be the first Secretary General of UNASUR and to collaborate in the drafting of the statutes of the bloc. This offer was formalized thanks to the consensus reached at the end of the First South American Energy Summit held on April 17, 2007 on Isla Margarita, Venezuela. At that time, Rodrigo Borja was very pleased and accepted the proposal. However, what happened between 2007 and 2008 was completely unexpected.

After the Margarita Summit, the Council of Delegates (or also named, at that time, the Political Commission) had the task of creating the draft Constitutive Treaty of the UNASUR and Rodrigo Borja, as candidate for General Secretary participated with the approach of perspectives and formulation of proposals. But Borja overestimated his own role and the supranational vocation of the nascent block,

because he came to consider: “UNASUR, to be effective, must encompass the two sub-regional integration entities that operate in our South America: the Andean Community and the MERCOSUR” (Telarama, 2008). In other words, Borja considered it to be inadmissible to add another regional integration organization to the two existing ones and requested that UNASUR replace them. However, this perspective differed from the vision of the South American delegates, who had the task of preserving the Andean Community and MERCOSUR. Evidently the state representatives sought to safeguard national interests and the levels of power achieved by each State in the existing sub-regional systems, giving little help to strategic regionalism and contributing more to fragmented regionalization (Bizzozero, 2011).

Due to these deep discrepancies and foreseeing that UNASUR could derive into the old rhetoric of Latin American integration processes, Rodrigo Borja presented a letter of irrevocable resignation. This letter was read by Michelle Bachelet at the extraordinary Summit of May 2008 and, since then, the PTP undertook to consult on possible candidacies for the General Secretariat within a period of 30 days, although the work would not materialize until much later (in the first half of 2010).

1.2. Contribution of the Chilean PTP to institutionalality: CDS, CSS and COSIPLAN

The balance that can be made of the Chilean contribution to South American integration is very positive, because it not only efficiently managed the problems that were presented, but also channeled the wills and concerns arising from these problematic situations to bequeath several organs of fundamental importance to the region. Thus, by sponsoring the PTP, Michelle Bachelet, was put into operation:

The South American Defense Council (CDS, for its acronym in Spanish): Its general objectives are to consolidate South America as a zone of peace, build a South American identity in the defense field and strengthen regional military cooperation. To achieve these objectives, the CDS adopted its Statute and its Action Plan 2009-2010 almost at the end of the year 2008, the Action Plan for 2010-2011 and, later, Annual Plans for 2012, 2013 and 2016 (noting the absence of plans for 2014 and 2015). In addition, since its creation, it has held 7 ordinary meetings, the last one in November 2016. It should be noted that, since its first steps, the CDS has served as a strategic instance that has helped to promote South American integration (Del Pedregal, 2009; Flandes, Nolte, & Wehner, 2011; Cruz, Da Motta, & Dias, 2019).

The South American Health Council (CSS, for its acronym in Spanish). The CSS is another of the oldest and most evolved sectoral councils of UNASUR. The purpose of the CSS is to contribute to "Health for All", consolidating South America as a space for integration in health and incorporating the efforts of other regional mechanisms. Since its creation and until 2017, the CSS has held 10 ordinary meetings, more than any other sectorial body (the last meeting in March 2017). In these years of work, the achievements have been transcendental: the CSS has its approved State and has agreed on several action plans. For all these reasons, it must be emphasized that the CSS has reached levels of cooperation and understanding in health matters never seen in the region (Riggirozzi, 2014; Herrero & Tussie, 2015).

The South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN, for its acronym in Spanish): it has become the South American institutional body in charge of physical integration, replacing the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA). Also created during the III UNASUR Summit, COSIPLAN was defined as an instance of political and strategic discussion for the articulation of infrastructure programs and projects among UNASUR countries (Rascovan, 2016; Bonilla, 2017). It should be mentioned that the IIRSA, has not been abrogated, but was subsumed by COSIPLAN as a Technical

Forum. Since its creation, COSIPLAN has held 6 regular meetings (the last one in December 2015) and a Strategic Action Plan 2012–2022 has been drawn up.

During the Chilean PTP, the South American Council for Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation and the South American Council for Combating Drug Trafficking were also created, which will cease to exist, at least with these denominations, very soon, as the first it will be replaced by several bodies that will assume their functions and the second will change its name.

Now, while it is true that the Chilean contribution to South American integration is very remarkable, this is possible thanks to Chile's significant level of national power, since this country has been the third in the hierarchy of South American power, as shown previously.

Undoubtedly, this period of PTP was strategically used by Michelle Bachelet who promoted the UNASUR, without neglecting the Chilean vocation for open regionalism, faithful to the peculiar Chilean geographical situation (Colacrai & Lorenzini, 2005), which allowed to deepen relations with its South American partners, but also, expand ties with the countries of the Asia-Pacific area. Thus, everything indicates that during the Chilean PTP, UNASUR began to substitute MERCOSUR as a mechanism through which Chile would interact with its South

American neighbors, since UNASUR proved to be most useful for Chilean diplomacy in its strategy to position itself as a “nexus” between the Southern Cone and the Asia-Pacific region.

2. *Presidency of Ecuador: August 10, 2009–November 26, 2010*

With this dynamic of synergies and progress, on August 10, 2009, the III Summit of UNASUR² was held in the city of Quito, Ecuador. This meeting marked the end of the Chilean Presidency and the continuation by Ecuador. During the years of 2009 and 2010, the Ecuadorian PTP achieved consensus for the appointment of the Secretary General of UNASUR, but also had to face important challenges.

2.1. Appointment of Nestor Kirchner as General Secretary

In the context of the MERCOSUR Summit, held on July 1, 2008 in Tucuman, Argentina, Michelle Bachelet called the members of CJEG to clarify that the PTP continued to take steps toward the appointment of a General Secretary because, to date, no consensus had been achieved. Some candidates at that moment were: the Bolivian Pablo Solon Romero, promoted by

2 This is considered as the third summit because, in fact, it is the following one after the first and second summits of the *Comunidad Sudamericana de Naciones*, held in Brasilia on September 29–30, 2009 and in Cochabamba on December 8–9, respectively.

Evo Morales, but rejected by Colombia, Peru and Ecuador; the Chilean ambassador Luis Maira, backed by Michelle Bachelet, although ideologically distant from Brazil and Argentina (beside the fact that Buenos Aires had its own candidate); and, the strongest of all, the former president of Argentina Nestor Kirchner, who enjoyed the vast majority of support of South American countries, but with the reluctance of Colombia and Peru and, especially, the veto of Uruguay due to the problem caused by the installation of pulp mills on the Uruguay River.

After months of stagnation and having ended the Chilean PTP, the Uruguayan veto finished when the government of Tabare Vazquez concluded (March 1, 2010) and was succeeded by José Mujica (2010–2015) who, assuming the internal political costs, decided to give a turn to the conflict of the pulp mills and offer a gesture of goodwill to its Argentine counterpart. For her part, Cristina Fernández visited Peru in March 2010 and publicly apologized for the sale of arms her country made to Ecuador in the context of the border conflict between Peru and Ecuador in the mid-1990s. Having filed roughs and with the Ecuadorian Rafael Correa at the head of the PTP, on May 4, 2010 an extraordinary Summit with the purpose of, finally, appointing Nestor Kirchner, as General Secretary of UNASUR was held in Los Cardales (Argentina).

It should be noted that the appointment of Kirchner took place in

a context still favorable for the leftist governments of South America, a fact that although it helped to promote the integrationist project, it also favored a certain institutional carelessness because, as Socorro Ramirez points out, this “appointment went beyond the UNASUR statute, which requires the Secretary General’s exclusive dedication and caused the virtual transfer of the UNASUR Secretariat’s headquarters from Quito to Buenos Aires, to facilitate the work that Kirchner was developing at that time, as deputy and as politician in search of presidential reelection” (Ramírez, 2011).

2.2. Contribution of the Ecuadorian PTP to institutionalality: CSEF and CSPMD

As in the Chilean PTP, the balance of Ecuador’s performance leading UNASUR is also very positive, not only because of the excellent management of the problems it faced, but also because of the institutional advances it promoted within the same bloc. Evidence of this is the strengthening of the institutional structure of UNASUR thanks to the creation of:

The South American Council of Economy and Finance (CSEF, for its acronym in Spanish): body made up of the Ministers of Economy and/or Finance of South America as well as by the Presidents of the Central Banks of the member countries. According to its statute, this is an organ of an intergovernmental nature whose main objectives revolve around

social and human development, economic growth, financial integration, commercial cooperation, and sectoral collaboration. The CSEF was officially constituted in May 2011; however, despite its importance, this body has lost dynamism since its foundation since it has only held 4 ordinary meetings (the last one in July 2014).

The South American Council on the World Drug Problem (CSPMD, for its acronym in Spanish): although this body was created during the III Summit of the UNASUR, with the name of the South American Council for the Fight against Drug Trafficking, it was only in the following years that it acquired form and became operational. Thus, in April 2010 its statutes were approved, which defined it as a permanent instance of consultation, cooperation, and coordination to face the world drug problem. Since its

inception, the CSPMD has held 5 ordinary meetings (the last one in February 2016) and has approved a general Action Plan (which expired in 2015).

There is no doubt that Ecuador's contribution to South American integration has been very important, largely due to the commitment and prominence of President Rafael Correa (2007–2017), a statesman who found in UNASUR the ideal space to coincide with other post-neoliberal models of the region, expand the margins of Ecuadorian autonomy and promote their project of "Citizen Revolution" (Stefanoni, 2012; Sosa, 2013). However, it is necessary to recognize that Ecuador's national capacities are notoriously lower than those of Chile, therefore Quito's maneuvering possibilities were structurally lower than those of Santiago.

3. PRESIDENCY OF GUYANA: NOVEMBER 26, 2010–OCTOBER 29, 2011

Towards the end of the Ecuadorian PTP, UNASUR suffered a severe setback: on October 27, 2010, Nestor Kirchner, Secretary General of the organization, passed away, which again resulted in a headless administrative direction of the bloc. Therefore, the IV Summit of the UNASUR, held on November 26, 2010 Georgetown, was marked by a mourning atmosphere. Added to this are certain doubts and bewilderment because, for the first time, it was up to

the country with the lowest position in the hierarchy of power in South America to assume the PTP: it was the turn of Guyana through its Chief of State, Bharrat Jagdeo (1999–2011). Faced with this, the leaders of the bloc proceeded to make a series of operational adjustments.

According to the Constitutive Treaty, the most important attribution of the PTP is precisely that of "preparing, convening and presiding over the

meetings of the organs of UNASUR” (UNASUR, 2008, art. 7), this means that Guyana became the main responsible to continue with the South American integration in 2010–2011. However, Guyana is the country with the lowest endowment of national capacities in South America (see Graph 1), which significantly reduces, not only the possibilities of leadership, but also its technical support functions required by the PTP.

Foreseeing the Guyana difficulties, the Council of Delegates (CDD, its acronym in Spanish) approved on July 7, 2010, the *Disposición 01/2010* which established the following: “The Presidency of Sectoral Ministerial Meetings, Ministerial Level Councils, Working Groups and other instance of UNASUR will correspond to the Member State that occupies the Pro Tempore Presidency of UNASUR, unless, upon proposal of the latter, the respective instance agrees by consensus to designate another Member State” (CDD, 2010). Obviously, this rule was made not only by the insufficiency of Guyana, but also by the national interests of each State in specific sectors. Thus, one day before the Georgetown Summit, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMRE, its acronym in Spanish) distributed the presidencies of sectoral Councils among UNASUR partners, organizing the most important ones in the following manner (CMRE, 2010): the COSIPLAN for Brazil, the CSEF for Argentina, the CEE for Venezuela, the CDS for Peru and the Council of

Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation chaired by Ecuador (with the coordination of education for Chile and science for Colombia). This distribution will not only relieve Guyana of its responsibilities, but it will also make visible the interests of the countries over certain sectors of integration.

3.1. *Vacant Secretariat*

Although mourning prevailed, the harsh reality faced by UNASUR was that the ownership of the General Secretariat was again vacant. Here is a worrying fact that gives context to the situation: from May 23, 2008 (considered the founding date of UNASUR) until the Georgetown Summit, 918 days had elapsed; the Secretariat had a headline on only 177 days (19% of the time). Now, the countries of the region would engage in another struggle to reach the consensus necessary for the position.

On December 3, 2010, within the framework of the xx Ibero-American Summit held in Mar del Plata (Argentina), an Extraordinary Summit of UNASUR was celebrated. The main reason for this meeting was to exchange views on the possible successors of Nestor Kirchner, resulting in the most important agreement that “the person appointed to the position of Secretary General did not necessarily have to be a former president, although that would be ideal” (CJEG, 2010, p. 1). Undoubtedly, with this agreement, the leaders of

the bloc made their positions flexible and greatly expanded the possibilities. That's how many names began to be shuffled: Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez, who faced Argentina's refusal because of his former role at Uruguay River pulp mill dispute and his rejection of Kirchner; Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, who apologized for her new job as head of UN Women; former Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana; and, even, Brazilian Marco Aurelio García, adviser to the President Lula da Silva. However, the only candidatures that became official were, on one hand, the Colombian María Emma Mejía, who had served as "vice president, minister of Education and ambassador in Spain" (CJEG, 2010, p.2) and, on the other hand, the nomination of Venezuela who had presented "the candidacy of Dr. Ali Rodríguez, Minister of Electricity and president of CORPOELEC" (CJEG, 2010, p.2). With two candidatures, delegations had to reach a consensus. To do this, they agreed to a recess and scheduled a meeting for the next day. This second session was never held.

The competition between Colombia and Venezuela by the General Secretariat was shown as one more episode of the constant frictions between the two Latin American sub-regional powers (Morales, 2020), but this time there was a risk of polarizing regional policy. To avoid this, the CMRE devised an unusual and Solomonic solution: on March 11, 2011 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs proposed the

CJEG "the joint appointment of Mrs. María Emma Mejía of Colombia and of Mr. Alí Rodríguez Araque of Venezuela, as General Secretaries of UNASUR, for a period of one year each, in that order" (CMRE, 2011). Almost a week and a half later, 9 countries had responded affirmatively to the proposal (only Bolivia, Paraguay and Venezuela were missing), but as there was no veto on their part, the CDD recommended that the Guyanese PTP contact them to communicate this agreement. Thus, Emma Mejía formally took office on May 9, 2011 upon receiving the instrument of nomination by President Bharrat Jagdeo in his capacity as PTP.

3.2. *Appointment of Emma Mejía as Secretary General*

Although this agreement can be seen as a triple diplomatic victory, which reported political benefits for Colombia and Venezuela, as well as for the region as a whole, it was actually an urgent step, since UNASUR had to face two major tasks: 1) by mandate of the CJEG, the Secretariat should support the PTP for the design of a draft "General Regulations" that includes the criteria for the organic functioning of UNASUR; 2) the new head of the General Secretariat had to start up an institutional body that was practically inoperative until then, since from May 23, 2008 to May 4, 2010 there was no individual in charge, and then, with Nestor Kirchner, the progress amounted to little, as much

of the attention and energies of the Argentine politician were placed upon the presidential elections that would take place in his country in 2011. In addition, Emma Mejia corresponded to start work from her country and in a couple of months, move the General Secretariat to Quito to formally start operations in its new headquarters.

However, from the first weeks of work, the advances were remarkable: during the meeting of the CDD held on May 24-25 of the same year, Emma Mejia presented a proposal of structure and provisional budget for the General Secretariat. As part of this, it emphasized that the General Secretariat should have an “agile structure, consistent with the flexibility and gradualness” (CDD, 2011, p. 2) and that the Secretariat should support the activities of the Ministerial Councils serving “as a mechanism of inter-relation and a common thread between these instances, and the other organs of UNASUR” (CDD, 2011, p. 2). These guidelines had an impact upon the identity and functionality of the Secretariat for the coming years.

3.3. *Guyanese PTP report*

It is possible to note that Guyana was able to satisfactorily resolve the challenges that arose during its turn in the PTP. However, there were two decisive factors for this: on one hand, the commitment and outstanding work carried out by Emma Mejia at

the head of the General Secretariat; on the other hand, the coincidence of political wills on the part of the South American presidents around the integrating project. In that sense, to indicate the dimensions of the scope of the Guyanese PTP, these two factors must be weighed.

Regarding the first factor, the management of Emma Mejia continued until June 11, 2012. It should be noted that during her tenure, the Colombian official and the Guyanese PTP were able to obtain the approval of the *Reglamento General*, which was consecrated one of the constituent documents of UNASUR. Now, although no sectoral council was created or reformed, during the PTP of Guyana were put into operation the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (under the supervision of the CDS) and the South American Institute of Government in Health (that depends on the CSS); in addition, significant progress was made in signing the Additional Protocol on commitment to democracy. The brief report presented in July 2011 by the Guyanese PTP gave evidence of all this.

Regarding the second factor, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the political-ideological coincidence of the South American presidents. It must be remembered that, starting in 1999, progressive or left-wing politics came to power, from Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (February 1999) to José Mujica (March 2010). Based on this, it is possible to qualify the period that

elapsed between 2006 to 2011 as the *golden luster* of the left in the region, a very favorable context for political understanding and for South American integration.

However, towards the middle of 2011, this cycle began to show the first signs of exhaustion due to the departure of Lula da Silva from the Presidency of Brazil and the convalescence of Hugo Chavez. Despite this, UNASUR would be able to gain new momentum thanks to the holding of an extraordinary meeting of the CJEG in the context of the change of presidential office in Peru, on July 28, 2011. There was resumed both the purpose of advancing in the convergence in commercial matters, and to build “a model of cultural, social, economic and political integration with priority in the formulation of public policies aimed at eliminating socioeconomic inequality, achieve social inclusion and seek citizen participation” (CJEG, 2011, p. 1). In this way, socio-economic development and the fight against inequality, one of the main causes of left-wing governments, would be placed at the center of the regional agenda and Guyana would successfully close its PTP.

4. *Presidency of Paraguay: October 29, 2011—June 22, 2012*

Three months after the extraordinary Summit of Lima, on October 29, 2011, the V Ordinary Meeting in Asunción, Paraguay was held. This meeting saw

the transfer of the PTP from Guyana to Paraguay, which is also one of the countries with the lowest structural positioning in South America, as was exposed at the beginning. In general terms, the last part of 2011 and the first months of 2012 passed relatively normally. However, for the month of June, Paraguay would become a source of instability for the region due to the “soft” or “parliamentarian” coup d'état against Fernando Lugo (2008–2012).

The events that occurred in Paraguay provoked the immediate reaction of the South American leaders. Thus, a week later, in the context of the XLIII MERCOSUR Summit, an extraordinary meeting of the UNASUR took place to evaluate the crisis. However, the speed with which the events took place in Paraguay, the change of leadership in some important South American countries and the gradual reduction of political revenues in the South American integration, impeded diplomatic efforts and reaching consensus in the UNASUR, in such a way that the CJEG could only react strongly condemning the breakdown of the democratic order in Paraguay, suspending said state from the bloc and concluding in advance the exercise of its PTP.

Following the instability in Paraguay and the overthrow of President Fernando Lugo, the PTP had to be interrupted and then transferred to the next country according to the alphabetical order: Peru. Thus, the Presidency of UNASUR would be exercised,

in advance, by the new Peruvian President Ollanta Humala (2011-2016).

Due to its unexpected and premature termination, the work carried out by the Paraguayan PTP remained.

In addition, the reduced national capacities of that country should be noted because after Guyana and Suriname, Paraguay has the smallest endowment of power. Despite these significant conditions, it is possible to highlight that during the exercise of the Paraguayan PTP, South American integration continued its course: most of the Sectorial Councils of UNASUR not only held regular meetings, but also reported progress of their work

and presented plans for the following years; approved, the 2011–2012 Budget, which will be the first in the history of UNASUR, and the Annual Budget for 2013, second in its type but the first that will serve as a reference for future budget distributions; the creation of Working Groups was promoted in the scope of various Sectoral Councils; the command of the General Secretariat was transferred with complete normalcy, as foreseen in the Resolution of March 11, 2011 (CMRE, 2011). As can be seen, no new bodies were created nor was any important legal instrument approved during this period. However, UNASUR maintained its course.

5. PRESIDENCY OF PERU: JUNE 29, 2012–AUGUST 30, 2013

As mentioned, the arrival of Peru to the PTP coincided, practically, with the already planned relay of the Venezuelan José Alí Rodríguez in the General Secretariat (June 2012 - August 2014). It is important to underline here the relative importance of Perú in the international structure: unlike Guyana and Paraguay that had a smaller endowment of national capacities, Perú historically has remained in the sixth position of the hierarchy of South American power (after Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela), all of which makes it a relevant actor in the subregion, especially considering the remarkable increase in national capacities that it has experienced since 2005, as seen in the graph. Thus,

Peruvian President Ollanta Humana in the PTP in liaison with Alí Rodríguez in the General Secretariat, had to coordinate the actions of UNASUR.

5.1. Contribution of Peruvian PTP to institutionalality: CSE, CSC, CSCTI, DOT, CEU and Forum of Citizen Participation

The efficient work among the South American governments under the leadership of the Peruvian PTP would be added to the political advances achieved in previous years. Thus, it arrives on November 30, 2012, the date on which the VI Regular Meeting of UNASUR was held in the city of Lima (Perú), where notorious

restructuring was reported within its institutional framework.

During that year, the South American Council for Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation, which had been created just three years before, ceased its efforts and was replaced with three new councils with greater institutional autonomy and technical specificity: the South American Council of Education (CSE, for its acronym in Spanish); the South American Council of Culture (CSC, for its acronym in Spanish); and, the South American Council of Science, Technology and Innovation (COSUCTI, for its acronym in Spanish). Along with this measure, other important adjustments were made in the institutional structure, which are observed as follows:

The South American Council on Citizen Security, Justice and Coordination of Actions against Transnational Organized Crime (DOT, as it was named in Spanish): was created on November 30, 2012 with the purpose of strengthening cooperation on citizen security and coordinating actions against crime organized, but combining their tasks with the CSPMD.

The Electoral Council of UNASUR (CEU, for its acronym in Spanish): a body that, although it began to operate through two Working Groups on electoral issues, was fully incorporated into the institutional structure of UNASUR.

The Citizen Participation Forum: which will correspond to create a specific space for South American social actors and define general criteria for that participation.

With these adjustments, UNASUR will complete the 12 Sectoral Councils that currently exist. It should be noted that, although each of them has its own operating dynamics, the actions they carry out depend entirely on the national interest of the participating States.

However, in a balance sheet of the Peruvian PTP, it is possible to note that there was a very significant contribution to the process, which allowed to advance in the configuration of the “South American integration model”; that is, a model that has its own characteristics (Briceño-Ruiz & Ribeiro Hoffmann, 2015; Nolte & Comini, 2016; Nieto, Magalón, Yepes, & Castro, 2017) and that it differs more and more from the European or North American models. Undoubtedly, under the leadership of Perú and the coordination of Alí Rodríguez, UNASUR was able to take important steps in terms of political coordination, relationships with third States, and institutional development and economic and social cooperation, all of which contributed to strengthening the integration process.

After Perú, the PTP would correspond to another of the “younger brothers” of South America: Suriname.

6. PRESIDENCY OF SURINAME: AUGUST 30, 2013–DECEMBER 4, 2014

In the VII Regular Meeting of the CJEG, held in Paramaribo on August 30, 2013, the transfer of the PTP from Peru to Suriname took place, which was exercised by its President Dési Bouterse. It is worth mentioning that Suriname is the second to last country with the lowest structural positioning in South America (just above Guyana), which compromises its possibilities for maneuver and leadership.

From this seventh summit, the Declaration of Paramaribo was signed, which summarizes the work carried out by the different bodies of UNASUR during the period 2012–2013 and gives general instructions to continue in the integration process towards 2013–2014. However, the next task was to get a new head for the General Secretariat.

6.1. *Appointment of Ernesto Samper as Secretary General*

The candidacy of former Colombian President Ernesto Samper began in mid-2014 thanks to the support of his own country and Uruguay, but the consensus on the part of the South American presidents would take a little longer to arrive. Due to the cancellation of the Montevideo Summit in August of that year, as well as the pressure to continue the work of the

General Secretariat, his appointment was made official, although it was practically unnoticed: Suriname, in its capacity as PTP, issued a statement on August 22, 2014, through which the CJEG appointed “Ernesto Samper Pizano as General Secretary of the Union of South American Nations, for a period of two years, to begin on this date” (CJEG, 2014a, p. art. 1).

Ernesto Samper accompanied the Surinamese Presidency in UNASUR for just 100 days, because at the beginning of December 2014 the Extraordinary Meeting took place in Guayaquil, where the PTP was transferred.

6.2. *Balance of the Suriname PTP*

During the period between August 2013 and December 2014, corresponding to the Suriname PTP, UNASUR reported few advances. This can be explained, on one hand, by the decline of the political cycle of the left and the gradual breakdown of the prevailing consensus in the region; but, on the other hand, due to the small endowment of national power on the part of Suriname and the structural constraints to play a leading role.

In fact, during this period, no new sectoral councils were added to the

institutional structure³ of UNASUR, nor were readjustments made to existing ones. Moreover, aware of its limited national capacities, Suriname requested, as happened with the Guyanese PTP, the distribution of the presidencies of the sectoral councils, which resulted in the following manner (CMRE, 2013): 1) the CSPMD for Venezuela, 2) COSIPLAN for Chile, 3) CSE for Peru, 4) CSC for Suriname, 5) COSUCTI for Ecuador, 6) CSDS co-chaired between Suriname and Venezuela, 7) CDS co-chaired between Suriname and Colombia, 8) CES for Venezuela, 9) CSS for Suriname, 10) CEU also for Suriname, 11) DOT for Uruguay and 12) CSEF for Argentina. Two things stand out here: on one hand, that Suriname assumed the presidency of three councils and the co-presidency in two others, which speaks of its commitment to the integration process, as well as its relatively greater endowment of capacities in comparison with Guyana⁴; on the other hand, the lack of involvement of Paraguay, Guyana and, especially of Brazil, since none of them assumed

specific commitments with any of the sectoral councils or other instances of South American integration⁵.

However, despite the little institutional progress, during the PTP in Suriname, UNASUR budgetary exercises were approved for 2014 and 2015: the first one for an amount of USD \$9,830,375.00 and the second for USD \$11,872,517.00. Unlike the previous periods, corresponding to 2011-2012 and 2013, this time there are already specific guidelines in the distribution of economic responsibilities according to the national capacities of each partner.

In short, UNASUR began to experience a slowdown in its integration process due to the adverse political and economic conditions for the region. Despite its commitment, Suriname could not do much to reverse this trend. Given this scenario, neopresidentialism will be accentuated.

3 The only institutional bodies created during the Surinamese PTP were the Ad-hoc Working Group on UNASUR-Haití cooperation and the Working Group on Geographical Information Systems and the COSIPLAN Website.

4 Guyana, which also proceeded to the distribution of sectoral councils, only took over the presidency of a single sectoral council, which was the CSDS.

5 Bolivia did not assume the presidency of any of the twelve sectoral councils but did coordinate the Citizen Participation Forum.

7. PRESIDENCY OF URUGUAY: DECEMBER 4, 2014–APRIL 23, 2016

⁶During 2015 and 2016, the decline of left-wing governments became clearer: first, in Brazil, as a result of the October 2013 elections, a strong conservative Chamber of Deputies was constituted; second, in Argentina, the Kirchnerism suffers its biggest setback by losing the presidential elections (November 2015), against Mauricio Macri who, from his first days in office, proceeded to implement a brusque economic adjustment (neoliberal) in his country and foreign policy; third, in Venezuela, the result of the parliamentary elections of December 2015 represented the greatest defeat for the ruling party in the history of the V Republic; fourth, the adverse economic and political conditions in Brazil facilitate the launching of an impeachment process against Dilma Rousseff, which culminated on August 31, 2016 with her dismissal and the arrival of Michel Temer to power.

Beyond the unfavorable context for left-wing governments, the transcendent moment for South American integration was the breaking of the political consensus prevalent in previous years, which had made it possible to

significantly boost the development of UNASUR.

In this scenario, the PTP of Suriname was transferred to Uruguay on December 4, 2014. Something peculiar is that, for the first time since its implementation, the PTP was exercised by two different people, José Mujica and Tabaré Vázquez, due to the presidential relay already planned according to the political cycle of Uruguay.

During its period, the Uruguayan PTP had to face two major challenges: on one hand, coordinate actions with the new General Secretary, Ernesto Samper, for the relaunch of UNASUR; and, on the other hand, manage the crisis between Venezuela and Colombia that arose during the second half of 2015.

7.1. *Relaunching of UNASUR*

Aware that UNASUR had to move “from theory to facts and proposals to concrete developments”, Ernesto Samper presented on 21 November 2014 to the CMRE ten initiatives included in the document entitled *De la visión a la acción* (Secretaría General de la UNASUR, 2014). These initiatives were: 1) define as a regional priority seven multinational infrastructure projects designed by COSIPLAN, 2) implement the “Medicine Price Bank of UNASUR” and the “Mapping of Regional Medicine Production Capacities” agreed by the CSS, 3) create a “Science and Technology Scholarship Fund” regulated by COSUCTI, 4) implement the

6 The only institutional bodies created during the Surinamese PTP were the Ad-hoc Working Group on UNASUR-Haiti cooperation and the Working Group on Geographical Information Systems and the COSIPLAN Website.

“Manual for Mutual Assistance of UNASUR Member Countries” agreed by CO-SIPLAN and with the participation of the CDS, 5) provide for the opening of UNASUR skies according to the CO-SIPLAN, 6) create a “South American Observatory Network on the World Drug Problem” in concurrence with the CSPMD, 7) create an “Electoral Coordination Technical Unit” that reinforces the electoral missions of the CEU, 8) create the “South American School of Defense” under the guidance of the CDS, 9) provide the General Secretariat of UNASUR with all the tools to fulfill its new functions, 10) develop the concept of South American citizenship.

In the words of Alejandra Racovschik, it is possible to point out that during the first months of Ernesto Samper’s administration “there were clear gestures that showed a true political intention to move from ‘vision to action’” (Racovschik, 2014, pág. 2). That is, the transcendent moment of the Extraordinary Summit held on December 4 and 5, 2014, in the cities of Guayaquil and Quito, was the explicit support that the presidents of South America gave to the Samper project, support that was reflected in the declaration final of said Summit, with the approval of the CJEG for the document *De la visión a la acción*, as well as for the expressed will to continue with the process of construction of the South American citizenship and to consolidate the General Secretariat (CJEG, 2014b).

With this “spirit of relaunching” it is possible to highlight that, during 2015, the Sectorial Councils held work meetings and advanced their action plans. Everything indicated a revitalization of UNASUR. However, the crisis of governability in Venezuela, which has worsened with Nicolás Maduro, will have repercussions on South American integration: first, a diplomatic crisis with Colombia in 2015; then, the polarization of international politics in the region; and, finally, the virtual paralysis of UNASUR.

7.2. *Balance of the Uruguayan PTP*

Notwithstanding the “spirit of relaunching” transmitted by Samper and the exercise of the PTP by an intermediate country in the hierarchy of South American power as Uruguay, UNASUR was shipwrecked in its process during the second half of 2015 because of the polarization of the region caused by Venezuela: for the first time, since the III Summit, which took place in Quito during 2009, the annual ordinary meeting of the CJEG was not held and, worse, no extraordinary meeting either.

Given the inoperability of the CJEG, the CMRE will be responsible for responding to and following up on the South American agenda. It should be remembered that the CMRE is an organ of neuralgic importance in the political-institutional structure of UNASUR, which has, as one of its main functions, the responsibility to

resolve central issues of integration. In this regard, the CMRE was able to approve important documents related to the operational functioning of UNASUR, including: the methodology for calculating the aliquot corresponding to the contributions of the Member States, the Annual Budget 2016, and the Regulation of Financial Management and Administration. In addition, at the end of 2015, the CMRE also launched resolutions on topics such as South-South cooperation, mutual assistance in disasters and financing of smaller countries.

8. PRESIDENCY OF VENEZUELA: APRIL 23, 2016–APRIL 21, 2017

As scheduled, after Uruguay it would correspond to the turn of the PTP to Venezuela. However, the crisis of governability in that country resulted not only in the diplomatic conflict with Colombia but also in the repudiation of the new right-wing governments in the region, especially in Argentina. In fact, in his first press conference as president-elect in November 2015, Mauricio Macri announced that he would invoke the Ushuaia Protocol to suspend Venezuela from MERCOSUR, due to “the abuses and the persecution of his opponents” (CNN Español, 2015). With this challenge, Caracas assumed the PTP of UNASUR on April 23, 2016 within the framework of an ordinary meeting of the CMRE, as it was impossible for a

Due to the lack of consensus and despite the relevant capacities of Uruguay, the PTP of Montevideo was neutralized in many of its actions, in such a way that during its administration it was only possible, in institutional terms, to create the “South American Defense School” (ESUDE, its acronym in Spanish), the “Technical-Administrative Unit of the Electoral Council of UNASUR” (UTACE, its acronym in Spanish) and the Group of High Authorities of South-South Cooperation.

meeting between the South American presidents.

Although Venezuela can be characterized as a sub-regional power due to its significant national power endowment and its relevant positioning of South American power hierarchy, during its tenure as head of the UNASUR, Caracas had difficulties to boost regional integration because of the blockade of several of its partners. This is evident when observing the interruption of work in half of the sectoral councils because, during this period, COSUCTI, CSDS, CSEF, CSE, COSIPLAN and CSPMD did not hold meetings. Which were the countries that were more reticent with Caracas? The answer lies in MERCOSUR.

The period that corresponded to Venezuela to oversee UNASUR (April 23,

2016–April 21, 2017) also coincided with the PTP in MERCOSUR, which began on September 14, 2016. However, one day before from this date, the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay met to analyze the situation in Venezuela and the progress of their commitments with MERCOSUR. Derived from the discussions, they underscored that Venezuela had not adhered to ACE No. 18, crucial for the commercial operation of the block, nor *Decisión No. 17/05*⁷, for which they approved the “Joint Declaration on the operation of MERCOSUR and the Protocol of Accession of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to MERCOSUR” and established that “the presidency of MERCOSUR in this semester does not pass to Venezuela, but will be exercised through coordination between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay” (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2016). In this way, for the first time in its history, MERCOSUR was co-chaired by several of its members.

The blockade on the part of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay to the Venezuelan PTP must be added to a fact already foreseen, but which made the governance of UNASUR even more difficult: the departure of Ernesto Samper from the General Secretariat. After two years of work and without the aspiration to renew his mandate, the Colombian would conclude functions

at the end of August 2016. Due to the lack of consensus to appoint a successor, the CJEG decided, for those dates, to extend Samper’s mandate for only five more months (CJEG, 2016). That deadline was met on January 31, 2017 in such a way that, in the absence of the new Secretary General, the CMRE resolved that it would correspond for the Chief of Staff to “ensure the continuity of the General Secretariat’s functioning” (CMRE, 2017) in administrative terms. Since then, this position has been performed by Yuri Chillan.

In short, the balance that can be made of the Venezuelan PTP is negative, not because of Caracas’ lack of commitment to integration (Giacalone, 2013) but because of the absence of conditions for political dialogue in the region.

The management of Venezuela at the head of UNASUR ended abruptly: on April 20, 2017, that is, a couple of days before Venezuela officially handed over the PTP, the Argentine Foreign Ministry issued a statement by which it assumed Presidency of UNASUR (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, 2017a); this will be a self-delivery of command and was rejected by Caracas. With this last action, South American integration has experienced one of the most painful and regrettable *episodes in its history*.

7 This contains the “Protocol of Asuncion on Commitment to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of MERCOSUR”.

9. PRESIDENCY OF ARGENTINA: APRIL 21, 2017–APRIL 17, 2018

Although Argentina can be considered a reemerging regional power and a strong semi-peripheral state, its turn in the presidency of UNASUR was characterized by disinterest in the organization due to the change of priorities in Argentine foreign policy.

Upon assuming the Presidency of the Argentine Republic in 2015, Mauricio Macri restructured the diplomacy in its entirety and made a profound turn in his country's international insertion strategy (Tokatlian & Russell, 2016; Simonoff, 2016; Frenkel & Azzi, 2018). With this change, Mercosur and the Pacific Alliance were prioritized over UNASUR.

Even so, Argentina took possession of the PTP in April 2018, "with the purpose of giving a renewed impetus" (Ministerio de Relaciones

Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, 2017b). The main commitment of the Macri government to give said impulse to UNASUR was to propose the candidacy of the Argentine José Octavio Bordón to the organization's General Secretariat. Venezuela was the first to oppose it in reaction to Macri's criticism of the Nicolás Maduro government.

Faced with the frustrated attempt to find a new Secretary General and the growing political-ideological distance between the South American presidents, UNASUR entered into a debacle, which was consummated when Argentina concluded its PTP and decided to leave the subregional organization, accompanied by 5 other countries.

10. PRESIDENCY OF BOLIVIA: APRIL 17, 2018–APRIL 15, 2019

So a few days after Bolivia assumed the PTP, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru communicated their decision not to participate any more in the Unasur meetings (EFE, 2018) and, in addition, they suspended their financing to the block, an amount that represented more than 80% of UNASUR's resources. The following month Ecuador took the same step and then demanded the return of the Néstor

Kirchner Building, the organization's headquarters.

As can be corroborated in Graph 1, the countries that remained in UNASUR, except for Venezuela, are some of the lowest in the South American hierarchy of power: Guyana, Suriname, Bolivia, and Uruguay. Despite the leadership of the Bolivian PTP with Evo Morales, who tried on several occasions to bring together the South American foreign ministers and facilitate

dialogue, the reduced capacities of the States that remained in UNASUR were not enough to save the organization.

On March 22, 2019, the Heads of States of Argentina (Mauricio Macri), Brazil (Jair Bolsonaro), Chile (Sebastián Piñera), Colombia (Iván Duque), Perú (Martín Vizcarra) Ecuador (Lenin Moreno), Paraguay (Mario Abdo) and, as well as the Guyana Ambassador to Chile (George Wilfred Talbot) met in Santiago (Chile) to create the *Foro para el Progreso de América del Sur (Prosur)*, a new organization that seeks “to have a flexible, lightweight, inexpensive structure, with clear operating rules and an agile decision-making mechanism that allows South America to advance in

concrete understandings and integration programs based on the common interests of the States and according to their own national realities” (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019).

With a practically disjointed organization, Bolivia transferred the PTP to Brazil on April 15, 2019 (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019). That same day, the Brazilian government of Jair Bolsonaro denounced the Constitutive Treaty of UNASUR and, with it, formalized its departure from the organization (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2019). Since then, UNASUR has had no activities, its website is not working and the last publication on its Twitter account was May 14, 2019.

CONCLUSION

Is it possible to affirm that neopresidentialism has conditioned the UNASUR agenda between 2008 and 2019, putting forward the projection of the presidents’ leadership and national interests above the regional interests. This has been reflected and strengthened with the intergovernmental institutional framework of UNASUR, which privileges the national interest.

Only short-term political crises have managed to shape regional-type interests in UNASUR, although their perspective is markedly ideological and, therefore, consensus is not always reached in established institutional frameworks. Likewise, the new political orientations of the executive

powers in the countries mark the current weakening of any type of initiative in the UNASUR space.

In general, neopresidentialism through its expression in the *Pro tempore* Presidencies, as well as through the national interests of the executive powers in the region has affected the institutionality of UNASUR.

Moreover, it should be noted that, due to the lack of more solid and democratic supranational institutions, neo-presidentialism affected the integration process of UNASUR in a more profound way in the light of the international power hierarchy. The isolated and solitary way to implement the policies of the South American

integration by each country during its respective PTP, exhibited, even more, the unequal national power endowment of each country in the regional context with negative consequences for the whole process.

Finally, this work shows that the theoretical framework of neopresidentialism is applicable to cases of study of regional integration organizations

in Latin America, constituting an important contribution to future research agendas in the field. In addition to political institutions, future analysis of Latin American regional integration should consider even more the situation of national power as an essential element for the execution of regional policies and sustainable cooperation.

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