



ATLANTIC FUTURE

SCIENTIFIC PAPER

25

Actors and Opportunities: Inter-Regional Processes of the Arab Region and Latin America and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses links between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Arab Countries. The relations between regional organizations in LAC and their peers in North Africa and the Arab world are still fairly nascent and represent a very understudied area of interregionalism in the global order. However, three cases of recent institutional rapprochement between LAC regional organizations (i.e. CELAC, UNASUR and MERCOSUR) and a North African and Arab World regional institution (i.e. LAS) are remarkable. The re-launching of South-South cooperation in recent decades in a multipolar context favored the rapprochement between LAC and the Arab world. Despite the fact that both regions are not a priority for each other, relations and exchange have constantly grown in the last 10-12 years, accompanied by a progressive institutionalization of the high level political dialogue. The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the main drivers and obstacles of this multi-layered interregionalism fostered by a political, economic and social state and non-state actors.

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25

Table of contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Past and present of regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean.....	5
2.1. Evolving regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean.....	5
2.2. Three cases towards a closer relationship: MERCOSUR, UNASUR and CELAC ..	8
2.2.1. Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR)	8
2.2.2. South-American Nations Union (UNASUR)	9
2.2.3. Community of Latin America and the Caribbean States (CELAC).....	100
3. Regionalism in the Arab World.....	111
3.1. Evolution of Regionalism in the Arab World.	111
3.2. Regionalism in Arab countries: LAS, the GCC and popular uprisings.....	14
3.2.1. The League of Arab States: New Order, New Challenges	14
3.2.2. The Gulf Cooperation Council: subregional alternatives for Arab regionalism	155
3.2.3. Libya and Syria as cases of a weakened regionalism.....	15
4. Comparing asymmetric regionalism.....	16
5. Interregional regrouping and the Latin America - Arab experience	18
5.1 Summits, Dialogues and Agreements.	19
5.1.1. UNASUR and LAS Countries	19
5.1.2. Other initiatives.....	26
5.2. Non-Governmental transregional exchanges.	28
5.2.1. Council for the Arab relations with Latin America (CARLAC)	28
5.2.2. Migrants and Converts	29
6. Seeking drivers and opportunities for inter-regional cooperation	31
References	34

1. Introduction

Regional political phenomena developed during the twentieth century as decolonization fragmented former imperial polities and a global system of nation states emerged. Regionalist initiatives were also increasingly institutionalized as a political alternative in the wake of the collapse of the three-world dynamics of bipolarity and nonalignment, which had characterized geopolitics since WWII. With the end of the Cold War, regionalism became an alternative to the short lived unipolar system dominated by the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union, and to two competing processes: bilateralism and the increasing weight of non-state actors in the international arena. These developments led to new regional initiatives that overlapped with the preceding and resulted in a complex architecture of institutions of different nature and purpose. Recent forms of regionalism have been created taking past experiences into account. Earlier institutions adapt to new contexts in a process of cooperation and competition with the newcomers (Nolte, 2013). In order to better understand the complexity of regionalism's evolution, scholars suggest that regionalism be conceptualized in terms of 'generations' rather than 'waves' (Van Langenhove and Costea, 2005). This affords recognition of the current coexistence of regional agreements with different characteristics, objectives and institutional structures.

As regions and regional institutions become consolidated as political actors, they not only develop internally, but also build external networks of relations, which are increasingly analyzed in the political science and international relations literature through the lens of 'interregionalism'. Such interregional relations have resulted in the emergence of new governance spaces bounded on one side by institutions of global governance, and on the other by governance at the regional level. In their attempt to theorize the diversity of contemporary interregionalism, Baert, Scaramagli and Soderbaum (2014) note that interregional relations are often 'nested' with other forms and levels of cooperation, that is, bilateralism, regionalism and multilateralism. Transregionalism has also emerged as an analytic tool that allows us to investigate phenomena that go beyond the narrow framework of interaction between two institutionalized regions within formal and mainly intergovernmental structures.

For political scientists such as Aggarwal and Fogarty (2005), transregionalism refers to interregional relations where two or more regions are dispersed, have weak actorship, and where neither region negotiates as a regional organization. It constitutes a failed or exceptional regionalism or a precursor to regionalism. The concept of transregionalism, however, has also been used to account for phenomena involving increasingly relevant non-state actors, whether NGO's scaffolding global humanitarian or environmental efforts, transnational networks of corporate production, or the transfer of religious practice through human mobility. We would like to suggest that interregional political studies can benefit theoretically and empirically from interdisciplinary collaboration with history and ethnography, two disciplines in which transregionalism as phenomenon and concept has gained increasing currency. Notably absent from the literature in international relations is the debate on transnational social fields, generated by the circulation of persons and discourses.

Our contribution in this paper will be twofold. First we will explore the institutionalization of regionalism in Latin America and in the Arab world, in order to identify the historical development of each of these regions during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will then zoom in on the transformations that have taken place since the 1990's, as regionalism emerged as one of the leading forms of geopolitics. This will lay the ground

for moving into the core subject of the paper, the various dimensions of interregional ties between the two regions. These will be explored through the lens of political, economic and cultural processes and institutions. We will also review two parallel but distinct phenomena —migration and conversion. Both of these processes shift the focus from the state centered analyses of interregionalism to the transregional analysis of individual trajectories and the community and institution building efforts of migrants and converts. These are framed by state policy and state histories, but present their own dynamics, re-defining regional and transregional boundaries.

The Latin American region is defined in this paper as composed by the 33 countries that are members of the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (CELAC in Spanish). A complex map of overlapping regional institutions co-exists in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which has historically been one of the regions defining an Atlantic economy. Although LAC do not constitute a homogeneous sphere in cultural, geographic, historical, political or economic terms (Gardini and Ayuso, 2015) they share a common legacy and have become an institutionalized political group that defines itself in contrast to their northern neighbors. However, there are also distinct sub-regions. Central America, South America and the Caribbean are differentiated by specific trends and this has led to political subdivisions crystallized in several institutionalized regional actors with specific political and economic strategies. Subdivisions created by regionalist projects do not necessarily correspond to geographic criteria but to political criteria and shared interest. Several of LAC's larger economies are potentially important in an Atlantic reconfiguration. Mexico and Brazil in particular, have played important regional leadership roles and Brazil is newly aggressive in positioning its leadership in alternative economic and political reconfigurations of the Atlantic space through South-South initiatives.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the 22 states that are members of the Arab League will be analyzed as a region. Feraboli (2014) has made a strong case for the analytic autonomy of an Arab regionalism, rather than grouping Arabic speaking countries within Middle Eastern or Mediterranean regional contexts. The political tensions between the Arabophone world and its former Ottoman colonial metropole- today's Turkey, its linguistic distance from the Farsi-speaking Iran, and its sustained military confrontation with its political antagonist Israel, have strengthened pan-Arabism as ideology and political project and underlie the politics of its regionalism and interregionalisms. Arabism was facilitated by the common language of the region's schooled elites, Modern Standard Arabic, and cultivated by charismatic midcentury leaderships. Tensions emerged with the oil boom of the 1970's and the new contrast between the oil-rich rentier states of the Arab Gulf, which developed as conservative monarchies championing Islam, and the oil-poor secular republics of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Cold War polarized the region into Soviet and American allies, with Saudi Arabia consistently aligned with the US while many of the secular states flirted with the Soviet Union and others -like Egypt- engaged both. Regional solidarity has been structured around the Arab-Israeli wars, with oil wealth transferred to Syria and Lebanon in solidarity with their status as frontline combat states.

When certain Arab states engaged in overt or covert peace negotiations with Israel — Egypt and Jordan in particular— the region became divided, only to unite again in the face of American military intervention in the wake of September 11th. With popular revolts and revolutions questioning state power in the region since 2011, regional leadership is being reconfigured in favor of Gulf hegemony. Non-state actors increasingly mobilize non-Arab national projects based on linguistic or religious criteria, such as Amazigh separatism in North Africa, Kurdish nationalism and variously imagined “Islamic” authorities in the Levant. Though the Arab world is not

geographically an Atlantic space, its historical migratory ties and growing economic interaction with the LAC region facilitate the emergence of interregional opportunities.

2. Past and present of regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean

LAC is a heterogeneous space integrated by a web of ties and a plethora of multilateral institutions. These initiatives have variable geometries and historical evolutions. Different initiatives configure different regional spaces ranging from the hemispheric, such as the Organization of America States (OAS), to sub-regional spaces such as Central America, South America or the Andean region. Some were intended to increase the autonomy of the actors involved and to enhance sustainable development in order to overcome historical imbalances. Others have been configured by particular ideological or strategic options, as is the case of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) or the Pacific Alliance. This section will provide a brief description of the evolution of LAC regionalism and the current map of the multiple types of existing institutions.¹ Three Latin American regional institutions will be described in further detail because, due to their characteristics and trajectory, they have had or intend to have, a privileged role in inter-regional relations with the Arab region.

2.1. Evolving regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional integration has been a LAC affair since independence from the Spanish Empire. The common political culture and close social ties among the *criollo* elites that championed independence gave rise to various ephemeral projects for joint polities: empires and confederations. Some confederations initiatives, for instance the “Patria Grande” that regional liberators Simon Bolívar and José de San Martín imagined derived from a reluctance to break apart territories that belonged to the same colonial administrative unit. The two new imperial projects in the region —the Mexican and the Brazilian— threatened to control and annex territories at their borders. After the Mexican Empire’s annexation of Central America, Francisco Morazán led various unsuccessful attempts to create the Federal Republic of Central America between 1824 and 1836. The process of national consolidation of new republics prevailed in the region however, with the exception of Brazil, which remained an Empire after Uruguay’s independence from it in 1828. In 1847 Mexico lost half of its territory to the United States. By the time Cuba attained independence, nationalist ideologue José Martí was as enthusiastic about creating a Cuban nationalism as he was concerned with, on the one hand breaking away from Spain, but on the other preventing interference or annexation by the United States or Great Britain.

The fact that Latin American nationalisms developed as anti-imperialist on these two fronts crucially shaped the possibilities and constitutive tensions for regional cooperation. Among authors tracing the regionalist project in Latin America to the region’s process of independence, Best and Christiansen (2008) exemplify it with Simon Bolívar’s project for the unity of Spanish America and the 1826 Congress of Panama. Nevertheless, Giardini (2012), as well as Mace and Migneault (2011) note that the conference didn’t establish a region-wide system of cooperation —an “institutionalized regionalism”. Andrew Hurrell (1995) analyzes the historical evolution of LAC integration through two frameworks —sometimes coordinated, but others

¹ We are not trying to explain all the existing projects but the typology and highlight the most important. An expanded version is in the paper of Anna Ayuso and Gian Luca Gardini “EU-Latin America and Caribbean Inter-regional relations: complexity and change” in Atlantic Future working Papers, 2015.

competing—: the first is regional cooperation and attempted economic integration between the LAC countries, defined as “sub regional regionalism”; the second is a form of regionalism that covers the entire American continent, through an Inter-American project, referred to as “continental regionalism”.

Resulting from the Conference of American States in 1889, the first integrating continental organization was the International Union of American Republics (UAR), precursor of the current Organization of American States (OAS). Following the Monroe Doctrine, it accorded the United States leadership of the regional project. According to scholars, before World War II there were some unsuccessful attempts at subregional integration in the Southern cone. Latin American countries complained about poor results of the inter-American institutions and US unilateralism and intervention in the region. Despite its reduced capacities, it meant the beginning of economic, rather than political, integration in America. With the war, international organizations bloomed, through which the United States once again took the leadership of American integration, replacing the UAR with the OAS (1948). After World War II, a modern sub-regionalism was developed in Latin America in parallel with the European integration experience. However, these LAC initiatives evolved in many different ways according to different economic, political and social factors and in tandem with changes in the international arena.

There is an extended consensus in identifying three periods in Post WWII LAC regionalism. A first integrationist wave began in the late 1950s, when economic associations and integration schemes were labelled “closed”, because of the limited exchange between the region and the world. Despite the US agenda of continental regionalism during the Cold War, populist governments in several Latin American countries developed an economic subregional regionalism that worked as a mechanism to enhance economic development through the import substitution model, in order to overcome dependence on primary commodities’ exports. This kind of regionalism was structured as a defensive strategy against extra-regional and more competitive markets. The Central American Common Market (MCCA in Spanish) established in 1958, the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC in Spanish)² created in 1960 and the Andean Pact born in 1969—all with limited results—are examples of this model. The oil crisis in 1973, the public debt accumulation, and the external-debt crisis in most LAC countries triggered a change in the national economic models and the regional projects. Due to deep economic recession, the 1980s were considered a “lost decade” in the Latin American integration project. The regional organizations suffered a crisis but they didn’t disappear. They were transformed into new regionalism projects in line with neoliberal economic policies based on the Washington Consensus.³

From the 1990s onward, Latin American regionalism has been defined as “open”. On one hand, the United States re-launched hemispheric relations through summitry within the OAS System, with the Summit of the Americas in 1994. The Summits served as a mechanism for heads of state to decide on the general orientation of Inter-American relations, and to create the Inter-American system of human rights. On the other hand, Latin American states deepened economic integration and aspired to sub-regional economic/monetary unions. The 1991 Treaty of Asunción created the Common Market

² It was created by the Montevideo Treaty in 1960 and initially there were seven member states: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Between 1961 and 1967 Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia entered.

³ The Washington Consensus is the name given to a set of economic-aimed public policies proposed by some financial institutions with headquarters in Washington, and published by John Williamson in his paper “*What Washington Means by Policy Reform*” in November 1989.

of South-America (Mercosur), which, according to Hurrell (1995), has increased the institutionalized interaction between bureaucracies, politicians, new interest groups and entrepreneurs in an intra-regional integration process. This kind of regional integration was also seen as a way to increase bargaining power vis a vis industrialized countries in the context of multilateral trade negotiations leading to the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the end of 1994. After the creation of Mercosur, the Tegucigalpa Protocol of 1991 renewed the Central American Integration System (SICA) and in 1996 the Trujillo Protocol transformed the Andean Pact into the Andean Community (CAN). These were integrationist projects aiming to establish a Free Trade Area (FTA) between their members and moving towards the creation of a Union Market. Despite the initial impulse, none of the processes managed to create a FTA and steps towards a Common Market were limited. At the end of the decade a political shift towards leftist governments resulted from the impact of another cycle of financial crisis in many LAC led to a new regionalist cycle.

A third generation of regionalism was born in the early twenty first century (Sanahuja, 2014; Malamud 2010). The new millennium has favored extra-regional commerce and thus interregionalism. It has seen limited success in establishing supranational institutions capable of moving governmental commitments as a Latin American bloc forward. Authors have labeled new initiatives according to specific traits they want to stress: some speak of a *post-liberal regionalism* (Sanahuja, 2010; Da Motta y Ríos, 2007) which goes beyond the commercial liberalization model to a political approach. *Post-hegemonic regionalism* is another widely used coinage that emphasizes the increased autonomy of the LAC region vis a vis traditional Western powers, especially the United States (Tussie and Riggirotzi, 2012). *Heterodox regionalism* is another expression used to highlight the fact that regional states do not follow a common pattern but are adapting responses to increasing interdependence and global change (Van Klaveren, 2012). Examples are ALBA (2004); the South American Nations Union (UNASUR in Spanish, 2008); and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2010). SICA and Mercosur partially fit the new pattern after some reforms. A common feature of this regionalism is pragmatism and the stress on political and social policies beyond trade-related issues. Trade-focused integration processes have not been abandoned however; a clear example is the development of the FTA of the Pacific Alliance established by Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile in 2012.

This historical sequence has generated a complex map of Latin American integration with a multi-layered architecture (Grugel y Guijarro, 2011) in which multiple actors participate in diverse forums and institutions. The current framework is the result of a trade-off between economic interests and geopolitical and ideological purposes (Malamud, 2010) modelled by variable alliances and power-balance strategies. These multiple memberships of many countries involve the problem of compatibility between different projects with varied purposes (Ayuso, 2015). Over 15 extant regional cooperation organizations can be classified into two main groups according to their main objective. The first one gathers those integration processes aiming to progressively establish a FTA. Within them we could place SICA, CAN, Mercosur, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Pacific Alliance. According to market size, Mercosur and the Pacific Alliance are the main actors in the LAC region. However, they represent two different international integration strategies; the Pacific Alliance has a liberalizing orientation, while Mercosur has a more protectionist position. Of the two, only Mercosur has significant exchanges with Arab countries and has started to establish specific ties with the region.

The second group covers a diversity of organizations, including sectorial organizations, and classic intergovernmental cooperation bodies or political forums without permanent institutions. All these organizations have underdeveloped legal frameworks, and are

based on three pillars: political consensus, the promotion of a deeper regional interdependence and the improvement of interconnections. However, some of them - UNASUR and ALBA⁴- have developed significant institutional and cooperation mechanisms in the field of security or social policies. In contrast, the newcomer CELAC, including all the LAC countries, has neither permanent institutions nor legal personality. A common feature is also the lack of supranational institutions. Decisions are made by consensus or unanimity at high level leaders meetings and the tendency to block decisions in defense of national interest is recurrent. The “Summit Diplomacy” conditions of the decision making process (Rojas Aravena, 2012) obstruct further integration and weaken the credibility of integration processes and hamper its international actorhood capacities.

2.2. Three cases towards a closer relationship: MERCOSUR, UNASUR and CELAC

The relationships between regional organizations in LAC and their peers in North Africa and the Arab world are still fairly nascent. The introspective character of the first LAC regionalism, the lack of mutual political priority and the scanty economic ties between the two regions were obstacles to the development of inter-regional relations. However, three cases of recent institutional rapprochement between LAC organizations and North African and Arab World institutions are remarkable. A brief description of their main features is intended to help understand the institutional framework of the emerging relations.

2.2.1. Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR)

The Asunción Treaty creating the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) in 1991 was signed by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Created during the period of the open regionalism, its main objective was to establish an FTA while keeping a minimal institutional framework and an intergovernmental structure. In 1994 de Ouro Preto Protocol attributed legal personality to Mercosur and permanent but still very feeble institutions.

The Mercosur integration process has been conditioned by the bilateral relations between Argentina and Brazil, which were the initial driver countries and the main engines of integration (Pagani and Martínez Larrechea, 2006). No common external tariff (AEC in Spanish) is fully implemented and has been repeatedly delayed. The smaller countries are more open while the bigger, especially Argentina, have adopted protectionist exceptions in national interest. These unilateral measures damaged reliance on a system that is constantly conditioned by national and international circumstances. The commercial interdependence among Mercosur members is low (with the Paraguay exception is which has 45% of trade in the region) and the interregional investment is also very low, with an average of 2% of total investments.

⁴ In 2004 the president Fidel Castro from Cuba and Hugo Chavez from Venezuela signed the constitutive treaty. Bolivia, Nicaragua y Dominica joined in 2006, in 2007 San Vicente and the Granadinas and Antigua and Barbuda. Ecuador was incorporated in 2009. This initiative gathers a group of countries identified as part of the XXI Century Socialism to cooperate among them, but can be seen also as an alliance to counterweight Brazilian leadership on the one hand, and the pro-marked economies grouped in the Pacific Alliance on the other. The economic difficulties that nowadays is facing Venezuela is questioning the sustainability of some of the ALBA initiatives as Petrocaribe.

After years of stagnation of the FTA project, at the beginning of the new century the rise of leftist governments in most member countries lead to a renewal of the Mercosur project. In line with "post-liberal regionalism" an increased focus on the political aspects of integration and agenda enlargement towards socioeconomic issues was adopted. This shift was joined by reforms to strengthen the role of the institutions, both domestically and internationally, and the progressive adoption of a positive agenda of integration that goes beyond trade issues. MERCOSUR major decisions are taken by consensus. It lacks supranational bodies and indeed can't have them as the Constitutions of Brazil and Uruguay do not allow the delegation of sovereign powers.

The lack of non-intergovernmental bodies is a weakness of the Mercosur integration. Decisions should be approved by the internal organs of each country, which often takes years. The lack of progress in economic integration, the low implementation of the common rules and protectionist measures has prevented Mercosur to take advantage in its foreign policy agenda. Currently, besides the inter-regional treaties with members of LAIA, Mercosur only have preferential trade agreements with Egypt, Israel and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). The agreement with the EU has being over 20 years in negotiation without having reached an agreement.

Paradoxically, the stagnation of Mercosur has not prevented its expansion in CAN detriment. First was Venezuela which, abandoned the CAN in 2006 and applied membership in Mercosur in reaction to Peru and Colombia FTAs signature with the United States. In 2012 Bolivia signed the Accession Agreement without leaving the CAN, but ratifications are is still pending. Finally Ecuador is still under negotiations. As the latter three new member countries are reluctant to sign FTA's, trade liberalization of this block with external partners could become more difficult.

2.2.2. South-American Nations Union (UNASUR)

UNASUR was originated in the Brasilia Summit in 2000 but created in 2008. Between these two dates, the initial Brazil-led project evolved, incorporating the perspectives and political interest of the different actors involved. Thus today members of the Pacific Alliance, Mercosur, CAN and CARICOM with divergent trading strategies co-exist in the same institution, sharing a common political project. However, in the political arena different positions also come together in UNASUR comprising: the counter-hegemonic ALBA bloc led by Venezuela; a more pragmatic group of countries seeking to increase their regional and extra-regional alliances without confrontation, as is the case of Chile or Colombia; and revisionist countries like Brazil or Argentina looking to re-arrange their position in the multipolar global context.⁵ UNASUR is projected as a space to promote regional infrastructure and create common rules on matters of common interest, such as security, energy or financial cooperation. UNASUR also tries to keep the common space free from outside interferences and to project the actorness of a new regional player within other geopolitical areas and emerging powers.

UNASUR has a permanent Executive Secretariat based in Quito (co-existing with the previous Pro Tempore Secretariat) and a South American Parliament sited in Cochabamba (Bolivia). The South American Energy Council, was also created, the first of the 12 councils existing today.⁶ On May 2008 in a Summit held in Brasilia member

⁵ The effects of the multipolar global order is controversial; while some actors argue that multipolarity contributes to a more regionalized world, others allege that the diffusion of power "generate powerful centrifugal forces within regions (Garzón 2015)

⁶ The others are: the South American Defence Council (2008), the South American Council of Health (2008) Councils are the South American Council on Social Development (2009), the South American Council of Infrastructure and Planning (2009), the South American Council for the Fight Against Drug

states approved the final text of the treaty and endowed the UNASUR with legal personality.⁷ The UNASUR maintains an intergovernmental structure and decisions have to be made by consensus with the agreement of all representatives of the member states. In 2008 the South America Defence Council (CDS in Spanish) was created and Security became one of the axes on which the UNASUR has developed a broad institutional and political framework with the creation of the South American Council for the Fight against Drug Trafficking in 2009 and the South American Council on Public Security, Justice and Coordination of Action against Transnational Organized Crime in 2012.

All these initiatives mentioned and others related to social and cultural thematic councils are instruments to strengthening intra-regional links and enhance regional autonomy and South-south cooperation but they don't exclude extra-regional cooperation. In 2011 the Legal Bureau of the General Assembly of the UN accepted UNASUR as an observer member is used to express common statements not only to the general Assembly, but also to the Security Council. At the inter-regional level, the first action of UNASUR was the summit with Arab countries in 2005 which, as we will develop later, had continuity until now. Since 2006 successive summits between Africa and UNASUR (2006, 2009 and 2013) were also held. The first high level meeting among the UNASUR and BRICS took place in July 2014, during the Summit of the latter in Fortaleza, Brazil. However bi-regional relations with other regions have been conveyed more through the CELAC, in the case of Europe or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) in the case of Asia. The presence of UNASUR abroad is closely linked to South-South cooperation initiatives but the external action is limited because the lack of a common normative and institutional framework (Levi, 2013).

2.2.3. Community of Latin America and the Caribbean States (CELAC)

The CELAC was born in 2011 given the political momentum of convergent leadership across Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela that crystallized in the creation of a new space emerging from the confluence of previous initiatives. Its predecessor was the Rio Group, a political forum created in 1986 spurred by regional support for the peace negotiations in Central America. The initial group of 8 countries was expanded to include almost all the Latin American countries (without the Caribbean), consolidated as a forum to reach common positions, especially at United Nations forums and in order to institutionalize political dialogue with the EU. A new political impetus was provided by the Brazilian initiative to convene the first Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean on Integration and Development (CALC) in 2008 in Salvador de Bahia.

In the II CALC Summit in Riviera Maya, Quintana Roo (Mexico) called Unity Summit was decided to merge CALC and Rio Group and create a new organism. The Caracas Summit (Venezuela) in December 2011 definitively established the CELAC. The First Summit of CELAC was held in Chile in January 2013, while the second summit was held in Havana (Cuba) in January 2014. In CELAC different versions of what should be its role in the region coexist. While for some CELAC members consider it is a mechanism of political consultation and representation of the region that complement

Trafficking (2009), the South American Council of Economy and Finance (2010), the South American Council on Education (2012), the South American Council of Culture (2012), the Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (2012), the South American Electoral Council (2012) and the South American Council on Public Security, Justice and Coordination of Action against Transnational Organized Crime (2012).

⁷ It entered formally into force at the end of 2010 after the approval by national parliaments with the ninth ratification by member states.

other hemispheric or sub-regional forums, for others its role is to constitute a new counter-hegemonic bloc trying to escape the hemispheric agenda of the Organization of American States (OAS) dominated by the United States.

In the III CELAC Summit held in Costa Rica in January 2015 the Belen Declaration and the CELAC Action Plan proposed 27 extensive fields for cooperation, including a future establishment of a Latin American and Caribbean FTA. But the feasibility of the latest raises some doubt as, while countries such as Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico (all members of the Pacific Alliance) struggle to open their markets, the MERCOSUR members are reluctant to open them.. Among members there are also disagreements regarding the extent of future institutionalization; while the ALBA countries struggle to create stable institutions and become an alternative to the OAS, others prefer to keep it as a flexible forum without compromising their freedom of action, and its relationship with the United States. These contradictions didn't preclude that the CELAC is one of the most dynamic regional initiative in LAC and that political will to go ahead is strong. So far CELAC is primarily a political actor serving, first to reconnect South America with North America and the Caribbean breaking the North South gap resulting from the creation of the UNASUR. Therefore, CELAC is also willing to be a privileged inter-regional interlocutor. CELAC already has a strategic dialogue with the EU started in Santiago de Chile in 2013; The First Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CELAC Forum - China was held in Beijing in January 2015 and also ministerial talks were celebrated with India, ASEAN, Republic of Korea and Turkey. Belen Action Plan plan proposed to study the feasibility of stable forums with Russia, India, the African Union, the BRICS and the League of Arab States during 2015.

3. Regionalism in the Arab World

The institutionalization of regionalism in the Arab World is more compact than in LAC, perhaps because states in the region are much younger. Most of them are the product of mid twentieth century decolonization. Just as in LAC, there are regional and sub-regional organizations that respond to different political projects championed by competing regional leaders. Given the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the politics of the region since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, several of the region-building alliances respond to that cleavage and attempt to construct Arab political solidarities around it —this has been the case for the Arab League, but also for the OIC. This first generation of Arab regionalism was constantly interrupted by the tug of war between the US and the Soviet Union through 1989, when a new regionalism developed. The second generation of regionalist efforts moved away from Arabism and towards economic subregional configurations that attempted to tie Arab North Africa into a Mediterranean economy, the countries of the Arab Gulf into a cluster, with the ACC bringing part of the Mashreq together under Egyptian leadership. Security remained a central issue and as violence escalated in the context of US-led wars in the region that LAS proved powerless to avoid, Arabism was further eroded. A third generation of regionalism in the Arab world is linked to institutional responses to the popular revolts and revolutions that began in 2011, which have led to further securitization, and constitute an ongoing regional reconfiguration. LAS and the GCC will be described in further detail given that they are the two institutions most relevant to interregionalism; the regional fragmentation resulting from the uprisings will also be explored.

3.1. Evolution of Regionalism in the Arab World.

During the Ottoman period, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire shared a regional order based on imperial administration. With the Empire's collapse, the

Society of Nation's conferral of much of the former Arab provinces as Mandates to Great Britain and France precluded integration efforts. In fact, it was during this period, as they were recruited into the nascent culture of international governance, that these territories went through a process of political differentiation and the institutionalization of political boundaries (Banko 2014; Kaufman 2014). When they finally became independent postcolonial states in the 1940's, Arab states initially focused on building domestic structures rather than formal institutions of cooperation. Scholars debate the general characteristics of regionalism in the contemporary Arab world, focusing on four factors: subregional integration, economic integration leading to political integration, preoccupations with security, and competing supra and subnational identities.

The Arab League, the first regional organization, was founded at the end of World War on the twin principles of state sovereignty and Arab nationalism (pan-Arabism). Officially named the League of Arab States (LAS, *Jamiat ad-Duwal al-Arabia* in Arabic), it was established in Cairo on March 22, 1945, with six founding members: the Kingdom of Egypt, the Kingdom of Transjordan, the Kingdom of Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Syria; Yemen joined a couple of months later. According to Fawcett (2005), the League, faced difficulties in developing a common stance, as its two founding principles were "awkward" together. The League grew to 22 member states as decolonization in the region continued however, with North African and Gulf countries joining the founder core. Syria has been suspended since November of 2011, in response to the ongoing civil war. As a postcolonial alliance meant to safeguard the sovereignty of newly established states, LAS was useful as a forum to coordinate policy positions, contain conflicts such as the Lebanese crisis of 1958, settle some Arab disputes and deliberate on matters of common concern. The Arab world also emulated the European experience, attempting the creation of a Common Market between 1957 and 1967 with limited success. LAS has been instrumental in the creation of organizations representing the Palestinians since 1964, among them the Palestinian National Council and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

In the context of the Cold War, the region was polarized according to different clusters of states' alignment with the US or the Soviet Union. Concerned with Soviet access to the region's oil reserves, the US developed various strategies for intervention in the region. Some of them were meant to limit the operation of the League or provide alternatives to its leadership. In 1955, under pressure from the US and with the promise of their economic and military aid, the Baghdad Pact established the Central Treaty Organization intergovernmental military alliance (CENTO, 1955-1979), initially known as the Middle East Treaty Organization. Headquartered in Baghdad (1955-1958) and later in Ankara (1958-1979) after the fall of the Iraqi monarchy and modeled on NATO, the treaty was subscribed by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Though the US joined its military committee in 1958, the treaty was weakened by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and dismantled in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. CENTO was identified regionally as a colonialist instrument. The Eisenhower Doctrine (1957), which facilitated US military aid to countries in the region upon request, was intended to construct an effective regional alliance against the Soviet threat but was also imagined as an alternative to Nasser's leadership. In spite of both arrangements, the Soviet Union developed close military and political ties with Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, the People's Republic of Yemen and Somalia.

Just as the OAS provides a hemispheric alternative for regional affiliation in the Americas, the Organization of the Islamic Conference provided an alternate alliance for states in the Arab region on the basis of a common religious tradition. Founded in 1969 in the aftermath of the defeat of Arab states by Israel in the 1967 six day war with 25 member states, its first high-level meeting established a permanent secretariat in Jeddah headed by the organization's Secretary General. It is composed of three main

bodies, the *Islamic Summit* of heads of state that convenes every three years; the *Council of Foreign Ministers*, which convenes every year to develop means to implement policy, and the *General Secretariat* which is the executive organ of the organization. In 1999, the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States was established in Tehran. With the Palestinian National Authority as member, the Palestinian struggle has been a privileged issue. With 57 member states today and permanent delegations to the UN and the EU, the Organization aims to cultivate Muslim solidarity, to institutionalize cooperation, defend Muslim causes in world politics and contribute to dispute settlement in Muslim countries in an anti-imperialist key. In short, it attempts to build regionalism beyond LAS; it also incorporates states without other historical links to the Arab World. Important revisions to its charters occurred in 2008 and 2011. In 2008, shifting the organization's focus towards the promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms and good governance by replacing endorsement of the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam created by the OIC in 1990 with endorsement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2011, the organization was renamed the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

With the end of the Cold War a “new regionalism” developed in the Arab world, with its three historically distinct subregions establishing formal intergovernmental economic and political cooperation agreements. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — established in Abu Dhabi in 1981 as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf— underscores the centrality of security and alliance formation rather than economic cooperation. Composed of the six states bordering the Arab Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, it has been the most active of the three subregional actors. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) subscribed by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia and the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) of Iraq, Jordan, North Yemen and Egypt were both established in 1989. The AMU was committed to creating a common market, but political quarrels and individual Maghrebi states' differential relations with Europe have paralyzed the subregional project. The ACC was established as an Egyptian led effort, with Egypt attempting to re-insert itself in Arab politics after the estrangement that followed its negotiations with Israel; partly a response to being left out of the GCC. Regional instability during the 1990s, especially the Gulf War and the Oslo peace process, revealed both the limited capacities of the ACC and the sustained centrality of a security agenda despite the end of the Cold War. The ACC did not survive the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

After 2001, Arabism has been eroded by subregional projects and external pressure. The LAS was increasingly helpless in responding to security concerns, such as the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Lebanon-Hizballah war in 2006 or the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. The Agadir Agreement for Arab-Mediterranean economic integration subscribed by Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt in 2004 to go into effect in 2007 and the GCC commitment to a common currency —foreseen for 2010— can be understood, according to Harders (2008), as a farewell to a pan-Arab vision. The Agadir Agreement was meant to facilitate a free trade agreement with the EU in the context of greater UE-Mediterranean integration. It was superseded by the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)—signed in 1998 and projected for 2005— with 18 member states, which developed from 1981 trade facilitation efforts launched by the LAS Economic and Social Council. GAFTA remains a proposal on paper.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington led to a massive militarization and securitization of US foreign policy culminating in the wars against Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). These wars triggered a new regional order in the Arab world, characterized by an escalating degree of inter- and intra-state violence, which limits successful regional political cooperation. Re-emerging competition for

regional hegemony in turn strengthens bilateral and informal diplomatic conflict management initiatives. The “war on terror” led to a new foreign policy orientation of militarization and forced democratization of states in the region. Consequently, in the context of escalating violence, a new regional order instrumentalizes foreign military intervention as the trigger for “securitizing” regional cooperation, mainly in the League of Arab States (LAS). Nevertheless, new subregional efforts towards cooperation and economic integration, such as the Agadir Agreement, and an intensified interaction are strengthening the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The popular uprisings since 2011 have forced regional organisms to act on what were earlier perceived as the internal affairs of member states, while enhancing a new military cooperation that could prevent foreign intervention in response to regional unrest. The UN demanded for both LAS and GCC to take a more active role in the regional security situation. What remains unknown is how LAS and GCC will relate to the various actors engaged in the evolving political processes of countries where revolts are occurring, or to the new political landscapes that will result. According to Schultz (2015), the question is whether LAS will be able to play an integrative role or sub-regional organization will evolve towards the GCC logic.

3.2. Regionalism in Arab countries: LAS, the GCC and popular uprisings

3.2.1. The League of Arab States: New Order, New Challenges

The League of Arab States (LAS) is founded on the principles of national sovereignty and mutual noninterference, but through pacific conflict management is advocated in its Charter, it hasn’t proven efficient. Specific examples have been the separate Egyptian and Jordanian peace negotiations with Israel, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Iraq war. Subregional cooperation seems an alternative to the political, economic and cultural disparities between the conservative monarchies —Morocco, Jordan or Saudi Arabia— and the formerly revolutionary regimes —Egypt, Syria, Iraq or Libya.

The League established internal organisms like the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the Economic and Social Council in the Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU), through which the Joint Arab Economic Action Charter was drafted. Each member state has one vote in the League Council, but decisions are binding only for those states that have voted for them. In 1950, a Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation agreement was signed to coordinate military defense. Despite rhetorical claims and the pan-Arabist experiment of the Arab Union between 1958 and 1962 and of Jordan and Iraq in 1958, the Arab League materialized into limited integration of Middle Eastern states and actors. Other projects of union have had mixed results: the United Arab Republic (UAR) —the ephemeral political fusion of Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961— revealed the tensions of a pan-Arab project.

LAS faces, according to Michael Schultz (2015), the Westphalian logic of self-interest and power competition between its members. “Securitization” and militarization of regional politics had weakened the League as a collective actor. It is used as an arena of former regional hegemonic powers trying to redefine their regional position. For example, Saudi Arabia used the Arab League Summit in 2007 to re-launch the 2002 Beirut declaration on the Arab-Israeli conflict. When the revolts in the Arab countries began, LAS Secretary General Amr Moussa’s only recommendation at the Arab Economic Summit in 2011, was to encourage leaders in the region to invest in sectors that might preempt revolts by tackling the economic burdens of popular sectors. LAS didn’t provide any considerations on how to respond uprisings forcing rulers out of power —Egypt and Yemen—, nor gave a clear stance on supporting protesters or not.

In cases where state violence escalated against protesters, LAS avoided any statement against the use of force to repress popular uprisings.

3.2.2. The Gulf Cooperation Council: subregional alternatives for Arab regionalism

According to Monica Gariup (2008), the institutionalization of the Gulf sub-regional security complex can be considered an attempt of: 1) strengthen the sovereignty of the Gulf States; 2) balance regional powers by giving the advantage of the politics of scale to the smaller states —it strengthens the collective position of members in the sub-system. The most evident aspect of cooperation is in military and security affairs, as the members of the GCC consider themselves the regional guarantor of stability. A Peninsula Shield Force was created in 1982 against external aggressions; a collective security agreement signed in 2001; a Joint Defense Council formed in 2001 and a Supreme Military Committee in 2003.

The popular uprisings since 2011 are seen by the GCC as a direct security threat and have accepted that Saudi Arabia take the role of “regional coordinator”, while building an intra-Arab consensus. It may have a negative impact on LAS realm of influence if the Gulf States come to rely more and more on their subregional organization. The GCC also faces the Westphalian logic based on the fear less influential member states’ feel towards Saudi Arabia’s dominating position. Contrary to the LAS, economic cooperation has had some steps towards joint custom regulations and a future joint currency. In the security realm, though, arrangements or projects have remained symbolic, such as the “Peninsula Shield” —which failed to prevent Kuwait’s invasion in 1990.

At one point during the uprisings, the GCC invited the two non-GCC monarchies, Jordan and Morocco, to join the council, both to make the GCC a more cohesive organization, and to make it a viable alternative to the Arab League. The GCC, compared to the LAS, was able to provide to its members: 1) quick decisions to domestic issues; 2) security troops, such as in Bahrain and recently in Yemen. The LAS could only offer preventive diplomatic measures. LAS has not provided assistance or advice to its member states to handle the protests, while the GCC has pushed for minor political reforms.

The GCC was more actively involved in supporting Arab uprisings outside the GCC area. Their strategy was to provide support for political forces which seemed “friendly” to the monarchies —such as Islam-rooted movements and parties—, but that also coped with being Sunni, and specially Salafi. Nevertheless, the members of the Council didn’t support protesters in their own countries and opted for a “stick-and-carrot” policy: promoting economic reforms and investments that improved socio-economic stability, while suppressing and controlling civic uprisings, both in and outside GCC member states.

3.2.3. Libya and Syria as cases of a weakened regionalism

Concerning Libya, LAS representatives were divided between those pushing for the no-fly zone to protect civilians —only after Gaddafi started using extensive violence—, and those who aimed a cautious position on the domestic issues of a member state. Libya was not only marginalized inside the organization, but also among its neighbouring countries and allies —Egypt, Tunisia, facing their own internal revolts, but also the Gulf States. The only unified position was the subregional GCC interest in Islamists gaining influence against Gaddafi (Schultz, 2015).

No regional or international organization has proven effective in curbing the spiraling violence in Syria. After Kofi Annan resigned as mediator (12 April 2012), UN SG Ban Ki-Moon appointed Lakhdar Brahimi as a Joint Special Representative to Syria in coordination with the Arab League SG Nabil El-Araby. Due to the limited results of the UN-LAS led candidate, the GCC tried to work out a peace plan with President Assad. At the same time, they pushed for finishing the observer mission and even withdrew their own observers from it. The only coordinated action of both organizations has been the recognition of the Syrian National Coalition as the sole national representative of Syria, since November 2012. In March 2013, during the LAS summit in Doha, the Coalition was given the seat representing Syria, thus dividing the organization internally regarding support of Assad's regime. Unfortunately, the summit that took place 26th March 2015, in the Egyptian city of Sharm el-Sheikh, saw no invitation of the SNC to participate. Consequently, going from regional organizations to being more involved actors in the internal affairs of its members has been both a challenge for the Arab League and the GCC, as sub-regional alternatives haven't been successful in replacing a regional body, nor in pushing to a more integrating position.

4. Comparing asymmetric regionalism.

Latin America and the Arab World show strong asymmetries and internal differences. At first sight it seems that they are widely separated regions in terms of geographical distance, culture, language and religions. Nevertheless LAC and LAS comprise a diversity of countries, but within each region similar social and cultural values are widely shared. In particular, in terms of population UNASUR has approximately 412 million within an area of 17.715.000 km², whereas the Arab League has around 362 million in an area of 13.783.000 km². This means that population density is similar, both regions having a young population. The average life expectancy in both is over 70 years (UNASUR 74 and LAS 71). The two regions gather religious majorities: Catholic in South America and Muslim in the Arab World. The same goes for language, which is mainly Spanish in UNASUR and Arabic in LAS, which is a very strong asset to foster regional integration.⁸

Together, both regions have world relevance in many aspects. Its total area accounts for more than the 20% of the earth (without oceans) and its population (774 million) is higher than in Europe (739 million). But they have many differences in economic terms. UNASUR GDP amounts 4.187.035 million US\$ but inside big economies like Brazil – almost the 55% of the whole block- with small co-exist with economies like Guyana or Suriname. On the other hand, Arab League's GDP is around US \$ 2.776.672 million, also combining very diverse economies such as Saudi Arabia and Comoros.⁹ In terms of GDP per capita, in UNASUR is a 25% higher than in LAS: US\$ 10.163 and US\$7.670 respectively.

Both regions are net exporter of natural resources and raw materials. In the case of Arab countries oil is the main item of the vast majority of its economies. Only Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE possess almost the 40% of the oil proved reserves of the world.¹⁰ Oil and gas proved reserves of the world represent 63% in LAS and

⁸ Data source: World Bank databank. Note that even when Brazilian populations accounts for almost 50% of UNASUR population, it must be remarked that nine out of twelve members have Spanish as mother tongue.

⁹ Data of 2013 from International Monetary Fund, following the World Economic Outlook Database report (April 2014), GDP nominal (million). It does not include Syria.

¹⁰ BP statistical review of world energy 2014

30%, in UNASUR.¹¹ South America is one of the main producers of food. In many items such as Beef and Veal Meat, Corn, Grapes, Green Coffee, Sorghum and Soybean, UNASUR countries are global leaders in exports. Moreover, it gathers almost the 30% of the fresh water in the earth, since Brazil, Colombia and Peru are among the top eight countries in water reserves. On the contrary, Arab countries have serious troubles in this topic. From this figures interesting complementarities between both regions can be inferred. Arab countries need food and South America needs investments.

The social indicators of these regions are also very different. South America, even if during the last decade notably improved, continue to be the most unequal region of the world. UNASUR as a whole has a GINI coefficient of 0,45, whereas in LAS is less than 0,4.¹² In terms of the PNUD Human Development Index (HDI) it appears to be profound asymmetries, mainly intra-region. Among LAS members, five of them have a Very High HDI (Qatar, Arabia Saudi, EAU, Bahrein and Kuwait) whereas six of them are in the lowest category. In UNASUR, except Chile and Argentina (Very High HDI), the rest of members have a High or Medium level. Taking each region as a whole, LAS would be in the Medium strip and UNASUR in the High. This means that South America is less asymmetric than LAS in terms of HDI.¹³ Having wide strips of active population, means that both regions have a huge labor force. Unemployment was a serious trouble in South American countries during the last two decades of XX century, but the economic growth during the last 10/12 years significantly improved these rates and now LAS has an 6,5% unemployment. In Arab countries figures more than double of UNASUR (13,2%).¹⁴

Security has become another fundamental issue for both regions. Latin America is the most violent region of the world¹⁵ and the only one where homicide rates increased between 2000 and 2010. The average homicide rate in the world in 2012 was 6,2 per 100.000 inhabitants. Within LAC, South America shows lower violence levels than Central America, but considerably higher than the Arab League. In UNASUR homicide rate is around 16 whereas in LAS countries is nearly 4 times lower (4.61).¹⁶ Nonetheless, it must be stressed that even with lower levels of insecurity, LAS is a less pacific region than UNASUR considering other several factors. Situations like Libya, Syria, with millions of refugees and internal displaced people, or the conflicts in Iraq which became a battlefield due to the emergence of ISIS, appear to be extremely more complicated than any context in South America. The Global Peace Index¹⁷ (2014) put many members of LAS within the list of countries with a very low state of peace.¹⁸ South America seems to have left behind anti-democratic experiences and has consolidated government structures elected by the people, with only the *coup d'état* in Honduras in 2009 an unsettling reminder of the potential fragility of the process. In the

¹¹ BP statistical review of world energy 2014

¹² Estimations based on Worldbank and CEPAL data.

¹³ Human Development Report 2014 – "Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience". United Nations Development Program.

¹⁴ Data: Worldbank. Unemployment as % of total labor force (modeled ILO estimate).

¹⁵ Taking into account inter-personal violence (not related to collective issues like wars or terrorism).

¹⁶ Intentional homicide count and rate per 100,000 population. Intentional homicide is defined as unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2012.

¹⁷ The Index is composed of 22 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources and ranks 162 independent states, covering 99.6 percent of the world's population. The index gauges global peace using three broad themes: the level of safety and security in society; the extent of domestic or international conflict; and the degree of militarization. Comoros, Suriname and Palestine not included.

¹⁸ Taking into account this index, UNASUR as a whole (score 2,039) would be 85 out of 162 countries, in a list headed by Island (1,189) and ended by Syria (3,650). Arab League would be placed in the rank 124 (2,370).

Arab countries this is still a challenge for the region. After the so-called “Arab Spring”, many new governments have met challenges in consolidating the transition of power. In addition, the Syrian conflict and the rise of DAESH have affected the stability of the whole region.

The complexity of multilayered regionalism in LAC is unparalleled in the Arab World. This is not surprising given the very different historical depth of state building in the two regions. Latin American independence and state building began in the early nineteenth century; states in the region have been engaged in institution building within the current nation state and regional logic for two hundred years. Current states in the Arab world emerged after the last global wave of decolonization in the late 1940's. This means that they have had at best sixty years- about a quarter of the time that their LAC counterparts have had- to consolidate the current horizon of possibilities. As characteristic common features can be noted strictly inter-governmental institutions and the central role of presidential summits in the decision-making process that hampers deeper integration and hinders an extra-regional common action.

5. Interregional regrouping and the Latin America - Arab experience

The re-launching of South-South cooperation in recent decades in a multipolar context favored the increasing relations between LAC and the Arab world. Nevertheless, their relations do have a background with the Spanish colonization of America, and the incorporation of the Arab culture to the new continent in the process. Also, during the XIXth c., several waves' migration from the Middle East arrived in Latin America, continuing to our days.

South-South institutional interaction started with the Non-Alignment Movement. During the Cold War, they defended decolonization, independence, sovereignty, non-interference and development. Since 1964 the G-77 became the largest coalition for South-South cooperation. Nevertheless, these haven't inserted a dominant vision into the global economic or political order. Also, these were multilateral, rather than interregional organizations. The first interregional relations between LAC and the Arab world go back to the 1960s and 1970s, between Gamal Abdul Nasser and Fidel Castro —promoters of the Third World project—, as well as Venezuelan relation with some Arab countries in creating the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). More recently, in 2001, formal links were formed between the Río Group and the Arab League, as the starting point leading to a summit held in Brasilia in 2005 (Brun, 2008).

This section will address how LAC and Arab countries interact and which inter-regional links and institutions have been created in order to find paths for cooperation and convergence across the Atlantic space. Despite the fact that both regions are not a priority for each other, relations and exchange have constantly grown in the last 10-12 years parallel to a progressive institutionalization of the high level political dialogue. As mentioned Baert, Scaramagli and Soderbaum (2014) encourage transregionalism studies to account for interaction beyond two institutionalized regions within formal and mainly intergovernmental structures. Aggarwal and Fogarty (2005) also focus on interregional phenomena involving increasingly relevant non-state actors. Van der Vleuten and Ribeiro (2013), as well, encourage including regional actors beyond “formal” interregional organizations. This section will also address some examples of non-governmental transnational relations both, institutionalized and not.

5.1 Summits, Dialogues and Agreements.

5.1.1. UNASUR and LAS Countries

Countries from both regions, UNASUR and LAS, are Developing Countries and this facilitates closer political and strategic approach among them. The vast majority of the countries from the two regions take part of international forums promoting multipolar world governance, as the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) or the G-77. Other regional organizations gather countries from UNASUR and LAS, as full members or observers, such as: G-24;¹⁹ G-15;²⁰ OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries);²¹ OAS (Organization of American States);²² OLADE (Latin American Energy Organization);²³ OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference);²⁴ IDB (Islamic Development Bank).²⁵ Together participation in these forums facilitated mutual understanding to coordinate positions in international forums such as the UN or the World Trade Organization (WTO). These previous contacts paved the way to opening specific inter-regional forums between the two spaces. Also the wide net of Arab diplomatic representations in South America and vice versa has been an important asset to generate a solid interregional dialogue. This approach was also favored by a period of economic boom and the emergence of regional leaders in both regions with international vocation as well as by the increased room of maneuver for the emerging powers thanks to the tendency towards a multipolar world.

a) Summits South America – Arab Countries (ASPA)

In spite some good bilateral relations carried on between several countries during last century,²⁶ the inter-regional relationship didn't start until the early 2000. Energy was the driver for this new rapprochement. The president Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, an OPEC country member, traveled to Middle East during his first government in August 2000. The objective was, mainly to discuss on oil issues and for preparing the next OPEC Summit, to be held in September that year in Caracas. But it was the former Brazilian president, Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva the one who has boosted a closer link between both regions. In December 2003, Lula visited Syria, Lebanon, UAE, Libya and Egypt with member of his government, private stakeholders and Mercosur officials²⁷. During his closing speech at the LAS secretary in Egypt, he clearly showed his intention to create an interregional permanent dialogue. Brazilian President encouraged exploiting the potential of complementarity between the two regions and deepening the relationship with the Arab world. To achieve this, proposed to increase political high-level contacts between the leaders of South American and Arab countries thanks to a summit to be held in Brazil. He pointed out the good opportunities for economic cooperation within LAS and Mercosur countries, like with other countries in

¹⁹ From UNASUR are members Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. From LAS are members Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.

²⁰ From UNASUR are members Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela. From LAS are members Algeria and Egypt.

²¹ From UNASUR are members Ecuador and Venezuela. From LAS are members Saudi Arabia, Algeria, UAE, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya and Qatar.

²² All UNASUR countries are members. From LAS Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and Yemen are observers.

²³ All UNASUR States are members. From LAS, Algeria is observer

²⁴ All LAS members take part of OIC. From UNASUR Guyana and Surinam are observers

²⁵ All LAS members take part of IDB. From UNASUR Surinam is also member

²⁶ For instance, in the 70's and 80's trade between Brazil and Iraq (and other Persian Gulf countries) was important. In that period, Peru signed more than ten agreements with Algeria and Egypt.

²⁷ Eduardo Duhalde was the official representing Mercosur.

South America and the possibilities to increase significantly trade, tourism flows, cultural exchange and investment. Lula was the first foreign Head of State giving a speech at LAS Secretary. In that meeting, Brazil became LAS observer has Venezuela did three years later in 2006.

After this starting point, several preliminary meetings took place in order to coordinate the First Summit South America - Arab Countries (ASPA) ²⁸ held in Brasilia in July 2005. In this first meeting representatives of all countries from both UNASUR and LAS were present as well as officials from the Secretary of the Arab League, Andean Community (CAN), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). The main aim was to foster cooperation and commercial, political and cultural links between both regions. In other words, *“...the meeting had the purpose of strengthening bi-regional relations, increasing cooperation and establishing a partnership to pursue development, justice and international peace...”*²⁹

As a result from this Summit, the Brasilia Declaration was approved, containing 102 points.³⁰ Some relevant political topics were discussed during the meeting, such as the recognition of the Palestinian State, the support for the negotiations between Argentina and the UK on Malvinas Islands sovereignty, the respect of the territorial integrity of States, the nuclear disarmament. But also economic, social and cultural issues as the necessity of fostering intraregional trade, the compromise for a sustainable development, the fight against poverty and hunger, the technology transfer, the establishment of the South American-Arab Library and the strengthening of the South-South cooperation. Jointly with the Summit, the First ASPA Businessmen Forum took place, with more than 600 participants from the private sector of both regions. Moreover, some other sectorial meetings were held, following the mandate of the Brasilia Declaration.³¹

The dynamics of the relationship was clearly intensified and between the First (2005) and the Second (2009) ASPA Summits, 16 official meetings took place.³² The strong impact the First Summit has, encouraged cooperation between the two regions, and strengthened interstate relations. In the period 2005-2009 some South American countries signed bilateral agreements on different areas: Argentina with Egypt (2005), Algeria (2008) and Tunisia (2008); Brazil with Algeria (2005) and Lebanon (2007); Peru with Algeria (2005) and Morocco (2006); and Venezuela with Yemen (2008).

²⁸ ASPA meetings were carried out by countries from UNASUR and LAS, with collaboration of its General Secretaries. At the time of the First Summit, UNASUR was not completely shaped as today is.

²⁹ Fragment of the Brasilia Declaration.

³⁰ Divided in: Introduction; 2. Strengthening Bi-Regional Cooperation, Multilateral Relations, Peace and Security; 3. Cultural Cooperation; 4. Economic Cooperation; 5. International Trade; 6. International Financial System; 7. Sustainable Development; 8. Development of South-South Cooperation; 9. Cooperation in Science and Technology; 10. Information Society; 11. Action against Hunger and Poverty; 12. Development and Social Issues.

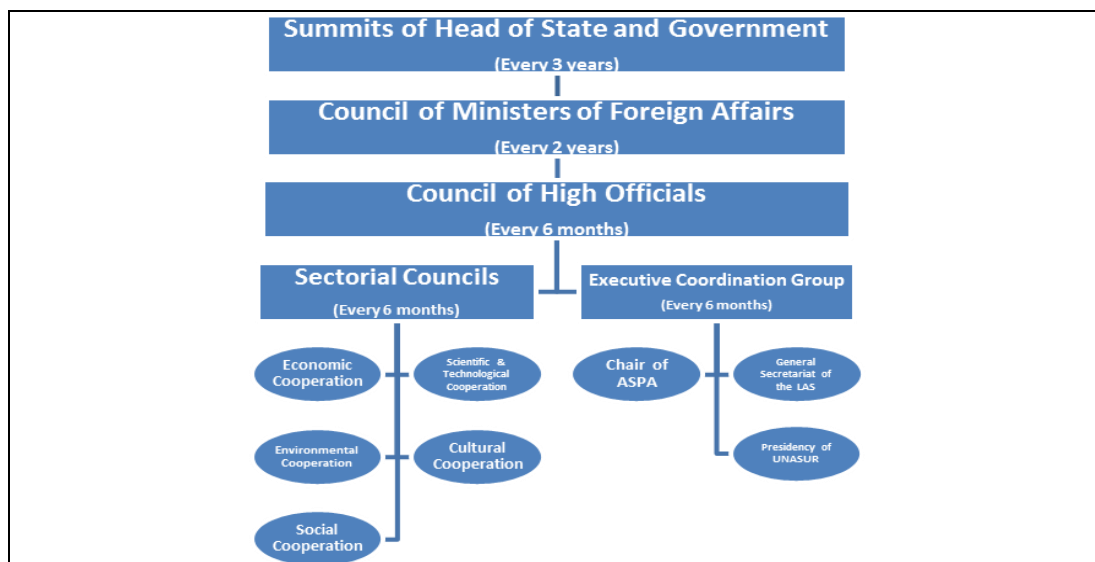
³¹ Sectorial meetings at Ministerial level in the fields of trade, investment, transport, tourism, energy, rural development, culture, science and technology, among other sectors, may be convened to pursue programs for cooperation. To that effect, consultations will be carried out between the Chair and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and the Pro Tempore Secretariat of the South American Community of Nations (Point 13.2 Brasilia Declaration)

³² 5 High Officials Meetings (El Cairo, Caracas, El Cairo, Santa Cruz, Doha); 2 Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Buenos Aires, Cairo); 2 Meeting of Ministers of Economy (Quito, Rabat); Experts Meeting to Develop the Project of the Arab-South American Library (Algiers); Meeting of Ministers of Culture (Algiers); Meeting of the Committee on Cultural Cooperation (Algiers); Meeting of Ministers of Social Affairs (El Cairo); Meeting of Ministers of Environmental Affairs (Nairobi); Meeting of the Committee on Science and Technology and Seminar on Water Resources, Semi-Arid and Desertification (Recife); Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Water Resources and Combating Desertification (Riyadh).

On the other hand, some Arab leaders traveled to South America during that period. The president of Algeria —Abdelaziz Bouteflika— visited Brazil, Chile, Peru and Venezuela in 2005, and the King of Jordan (Abdullah II) stayed in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Regarding economic cooperation during the II Meeting of Ministers of Economy in Rabat in May 2007, a Declaration and an Action Plan were adopted. This Plan established ten fundamental points around which both regions should work together to promote interregional trade. Among these it can be remarked the organization of businessmen seminars, the establishment of aerial and maritime routes, foster Arab tourism in South America, encourage governments to sign investment and double taxation agreements, among others.

In March 2009, the Second ASPA Summit took place in Doha (Qatar). The Final Declaration³³ has 121 points divided in a Preamble and six thematic sections.³⁴ The Doha Declaration referred to the intensification of the links as a result of the First Summit³⁵ and highlighted the Palestinian issue. Additionally, challenges on security in Middle East, sustainable development, nuclear disarmament and the resolution of the Malvinas question, continued being key points in the Declaration. The last section included the definition of the ASPA Structure.³⁶

ASPA Structure



Source: Own elaboration based on Doha Declaration.

After the Second Summit bi-regional and, in particular, bilateral- links became stronger. In addition to the agreements signed by Brazil and Algeria (2010), Uruguay and Qatar (2010) and Venezuela and Libya (2010) and Syria (2010), MERCOSUR concluded some other treaties as a block.³⁷ Moreover, some Arab leaders visited South America: The Emir of Qatar (Hamad Al-Thani) made a tour in Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela in 2010; The Prime Minister of Kuwait —Sheik Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visited Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay the same year. In 2010, Bashar Al Assad (President of Syria) met the presidents of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela. In 2012,

³³ http://www.aspa3.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=46&Itemid=64&lang=en

³⁴ Political Coordination; Cultural Cooperation; Dialogue of Civilizations; Economic Cooperation; Cooperation on Environmental affairs and Sustainable Development; Scientific, Technological and Educational Cooperation,

³⁵ "...Note with satisfaction the evolution of bi-regional relations and the intensified dialogue achieved since the First ASPA Summit..." (Doha Declaration, Preamble, point 1)

³⁶ Also the II Business Conference took place at the sidelines of the II ASPA Summit.

³⁷ See in next section.

Prince Abdullah Zayed Al Nahyan from UAE visited President Ollanta Humala in Lima. In 2014 King Abdullah II of Jordan visited Mexico, and the Minister of Foreign relations toured Latin America in early 2015, including Mexico, Cuba, Brazil and Argentina.

However, the most relevant visit to South America in that period was the President of the Palestinian National Authority —Mahmoud Abbas— in 200 to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela. During the tour he requested the South-American leaders to recognize of the Palestinian State and obtained positive results. Between December 2010 and March 2011, nine UNASUR countries recognized Palestine: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay. Paraguay and Venezuela had already recognized it formerly, in 2005 and 2009 respectively. Moreover, ten of these eleven countries voted in favor of the Resolution 67/19 of the General Assembly (UN) giving the “observer” status to Palestine within the United Nations General Assembly. Only Paraguay and Colombia abstained, being the latter the only country in UNASUR who did not recognize Palestine. After the Second ASPA Summit Also several official meetings were organized and some of them took place at the sidelines of other multilateral meetings.³⁸

The Third ASPA Summit was scheduled for the first semester 2011, but due to the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the regional instability those days, the Secretary of LAS decided to postpone the meeting. Finally the Summit took place in October 2012, in Lima (Peru). The Final Declaration was longer than the previous ones, containing 178 point divided in six themes, plus an institutional section. Among the most important topics were the Syrian crisis, the agriculture and food security, the development of an Action Plan committed to Education (Kuwait Action Plan), the opening of the Arab and South American Library (BibliASPA) in Sao Paulo, and the progress made in the field of environmental cooperation and health, specially the creation of a Meeting of Ministers of Health. On the margin of this Third Summit, the Third Arab and South American Businessmen Forum was held. After this Summit, meetings of Ministers of Economy, Culture, Environment, Health, Foreign Affairs and Energy took place in order to continue improving links. According with the Lima Declaration the Fourth Summit Head of State and Government will be held in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) in 2015.

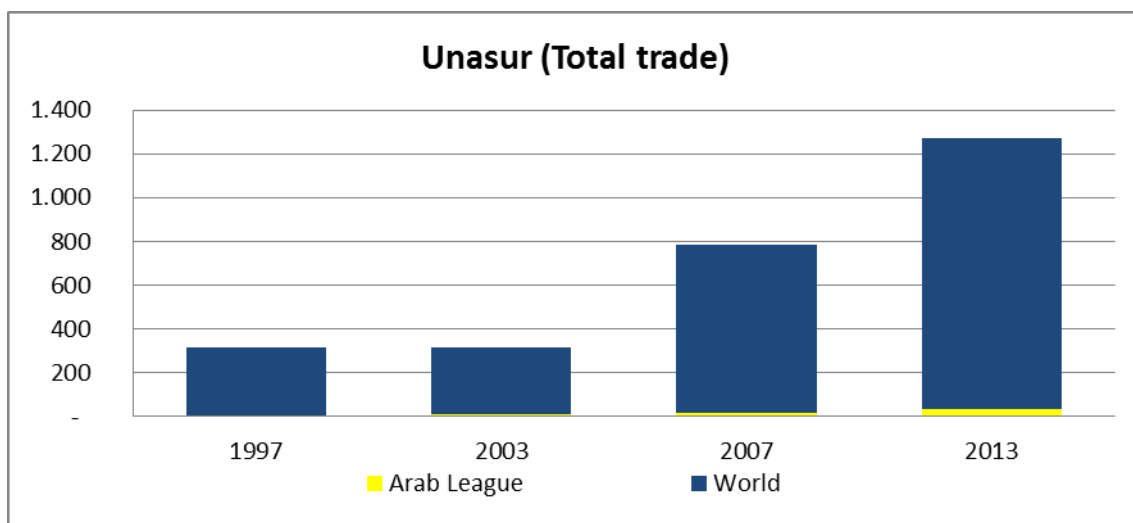
b) Trade and investment³⁹

UNASUR and LAS do not consider each other as priority economic partners. The proportion of inter-regional trade on the global trade of each region is scarce. In the year 1997 imports of UNASUR countries from LAS were only 1,5% of the total imports of UNASUR from the world, whereas the exports were 1,9%. It must be taking into account that the main export of the majority of Arab Countries is crude oil, and its most important clients are developed and heavily industrialized countries⁴⁰. Those proportions have been risen since 2003 and in 2013 reached 2,3% on imports and 3,2% on exports, but is still very low, as the graphic shows.

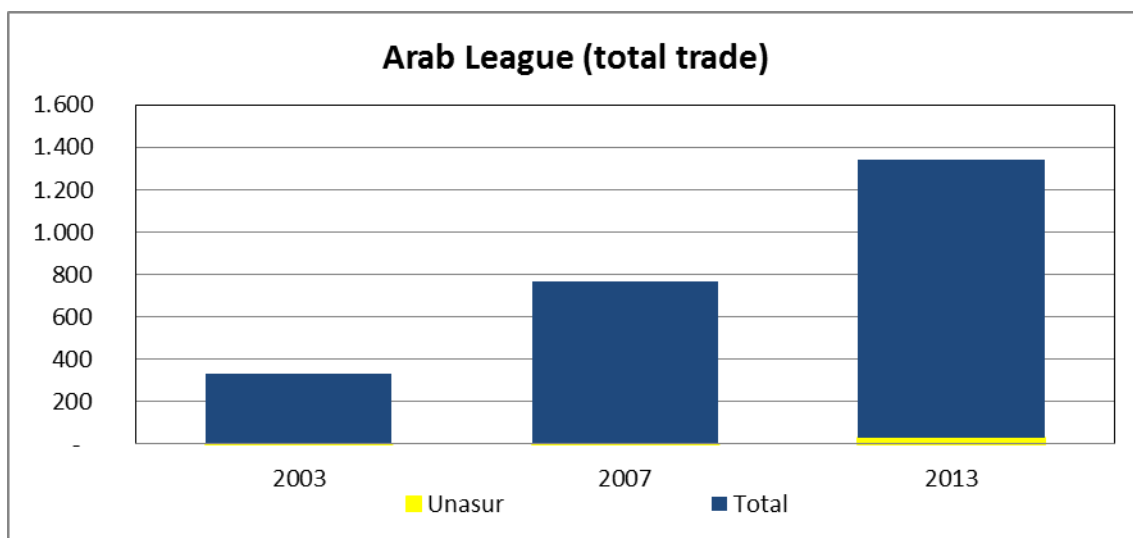
³⁸ Among which could be highlighted the followings: High Officials Meetings (Quito, El Cairo); Meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Buenos Aires, Cairo, New York); Meetings of Ministers of Economy (Quito, Rabat; Meeting of Ministers of Culture (Rio de Janeiro); Meeting of the Committee on Cultural Cooperation (Paris); Meeting of Ministers of Social Affairs (Brasilia); Meeting of the Committee on Environmental Cooperation (Buenos Aires); Meeting of Ministers of Education (Kuwait).

³⁹ For graphics and figures of this section the source was UNCOMTRADE. From UNASUR side Guyana and Suriname were excluded and from LAS Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia, Djibouti, Palestine and Bahrain.

⁴⁰ SELA, 2012

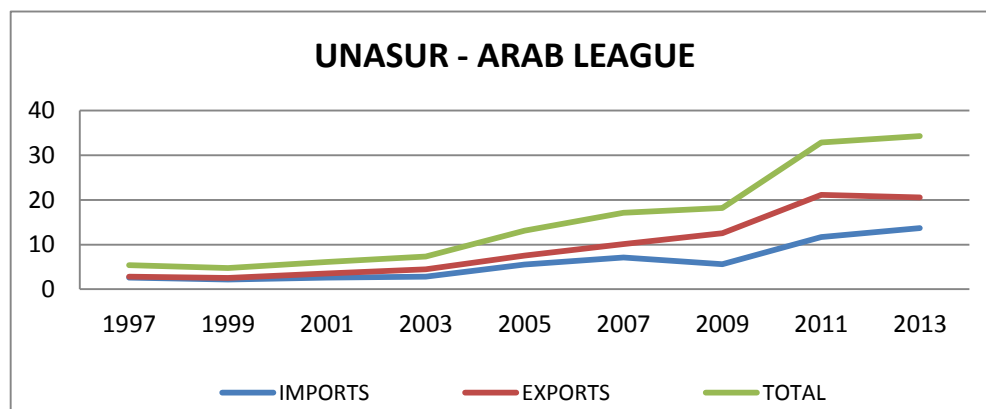


Data in billion US\$. Source: UNCOMTRADE. Graphics: Own elaboration



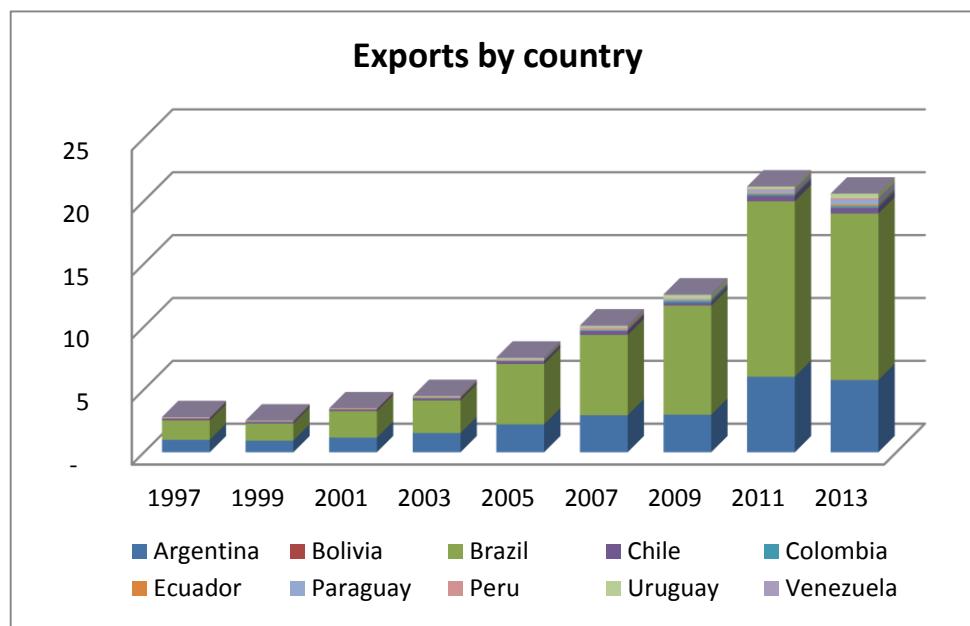
Data in billion US\$. Source: UNCOMTRADE. Graphics: Own elaboration

The mutual approach that ASPA generated has increased not only the volume, but also the proportion of exports and imports between both regions. Exchanges were about 5.385 million US in 1997, climbed to 34.290 million US in 2013. The graphic below clearly shows that the curve started goes up in 2003. After that there was a sustained growth, even during the 2008/2009 crisis. From these data it can be inferred that the political momentum of the ASPA Summit and the meetings of Ministers of Economy have resulted in a substantial improvement in economic exchanges, as trade increased five times.



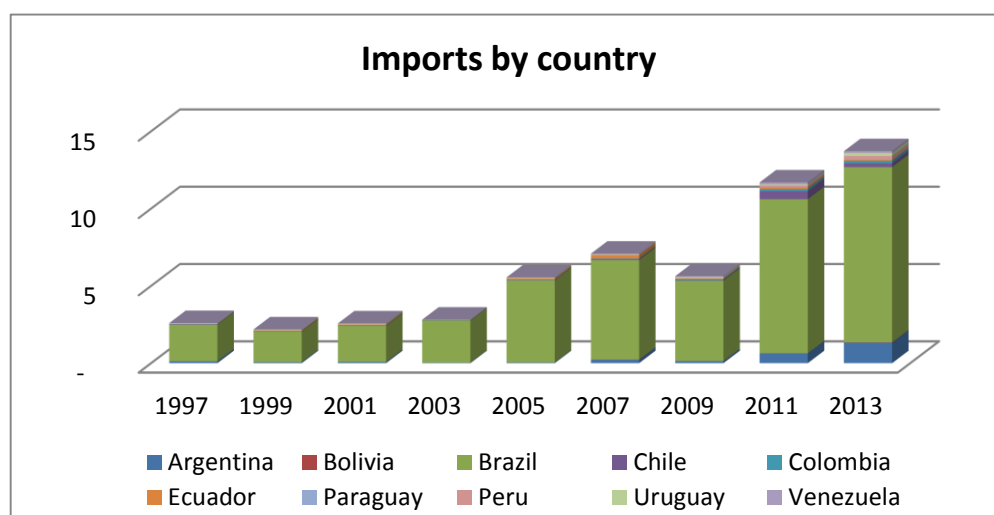
Data in billion US\$. Source: UNCOMTRADE. Graphics: Own elaboration

The graph also shows that the trade balance generates a superavit for UNASUR, which exports more than imports, and that breach widened noticeably since 2005. It is also important to note that this exchange is carried out by few actors. In the case of UNASUR, only Argentina and Brazil account for more than 70-80% per cent (depending the year) on exports, whereas on imports, only Brazil accounts for almost 90% during the period. Graphics below clearly show this trend.



Data in billion US\$. Source: UNCOMTRADE. Graphics: Own elaboration

D



Data in billion U\$S. Source: UNCOMTRADE. Graphics: Own elaboration

Also exports from both regions were concentrated in some products; In the case of UNASUR, raw materials and mostly foodstuff, whereas from the LAS, crude oil and its derivate are the most relevant items. More than 20% exports from MENA to LAC were crude oil in 2010.⁴¹ Also Petroleum derivate and liquefied gas had a great share of interregional exports. According to SELA report the main export items from LAC to LAS are: Raw cane sugar, unflavored and uncolored, in the solid form; Maize varieties; Meat of bovine animals, boneless, frozen; Iron ores and agglomerated concentrates; Meat and edible offal of hens and roosters, not cut in pieces, frozen; Soybeans, including broken soybeans.⁴²

Trade is directly linked to investments. Both regions have an enormous potential to further develop mutual exchanges. LAS members are foodstuff net importers, whereas South America is net exporter. On the other hand, the majority of Arab countries is oil exporters and tends to accumulate capital, while UNASUR has an infrastructure deficit, which necessarily requires foreign support and investment. Until now the field of investments is not well developed. There are only a few bilateral agreements on investment promotion and some others on double taxation. However, nowadays there exists a special interest from Arab countries to invest in South America. Currently, Arab investors have focused mainly in the service sector, rather than infrastructure. Even when many projects and dialogues are being held in order to foster investments, there are still under discussion. Nevertheless there have been some particular cases of relevant investments (SELA, 2012).⁴³

On the other side, South American investments in Arab countries are not outstanding. It can be highlighted Chilean oil investments in Egypt and fertilizers production and port

⁴¹ SELA, 2012

⁴² It refers to LAC and MENA, but the product trends are almost the same.

⁴³ The Qatar Investment Fund acquired -in 2010- a 5% stake of the Brazilian subsidiary of Banco Santander, paying US\$ 2.72 billion; The fund ADIA (UAE) has some important investments in real state in Rio de Janeiro and in Brazilian stocks and bonds; Dubai Ports World invested US\$ 700 million in Peru, at the South Pier of the Callao Harbor; Sonatrach (an Algerian state-owned company) has invested US\$ 300 million in a gas project called "Camisea", in Peru. Alí Albwardy (Saudi Arabia) invested US\$ 23 million in a Four Season Hotel in Buenos Aires. The Saudi group Al-Khorayef made a US\$ 356 million investment in an agricultural project in the North of Argentina.

operation in UAE, reaching around US 100 million in each case. Brazil has opened some branches of Banco Itaú and Banco do Brazil in Dubai, and the mining company Vale invested US\$ 790 million in steel production in Oman.

Trade and investments offers opportunities for each region, but require further development, trust and security. The creation of joint Chambers of Commerce can play a key role to promote mutual knowledge and to foster interregional exchanges. Today there are more than ten Chamber of Commerce, mostly based in South America. Also, embassies and consulates, through its commercial sections, are in charge of promoting trade and investments.

5.1.2. Other initiatives

As mentioned, some of the sub-regional organizations were invited as observers to the ASPA Summits, including CAN and MERCOSUR from Latin American side and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) from the Arab side, all of them common market integration projects. This led to strengthen bilateral relations, but also inter-institutional relations between integration organizations began. The results so far are modest and the effects of the economic crisis in some of the big economies of South America may hinder progress in negotiations in the short term. From the Arab side, the political instability in some countries of North Africa and the conflict in Syria also impede international agreements. However other initiatives of non-governmental sector that can become an active engine of inter-relationships beyond the inter-governmental level.

a) Mercosur and LAS countries

There are growing economic interests, so projects of interregional free-trade zones emerge to foment interregional exchanges. Previous figures have shown that the main South America partners with ASPA member countries are Brazil and Argentina, both members of Mercosur. Since Mercosur treaties require the Member states to negotiate trade agreements together several negotiations were opened with some countries ASPA. In July 2004, Mercosur and Egypt subscribed a Treaty with the aim of *“...strengthen relations between the Contracting Parties, to promote the expansion of trade and to provide the conditions and mechanisms to negotiate a Free Trade Area in conformity with the rules and disciplines of the World Trade Organization...”*. After three negotiation rounds, in August 2010 the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed. Mercosur officials stated that this treaty will contribute to enhance trade flows through the concession of preferential tariffs. Only Paraguay, as the less developed country of the block will enjoy a better market access to Egypt.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, almost five years later the FTA has not entered into force.

On the 26th November 2004 Mercosur and the Kingdom of Morocco subscribed a similar Framework Agreement. There was only one negotiation round, held in Rabat in April 2008. Since then there was no any step towards a FTA. By June 2008, MERCOSUR subscribed a Framework Agreement with Jordan similar to the one signed with Egypt in 2004 and started negotiations to reach a FTA. Two more negotiation rounds took place (April and September 2010) and it was foresaw that the Agreement could be finally signed during the 15^o Mercosur Summit in Foz do Iguaçu in mid-December 2010, but it didn't happen and nowadays is still under discussion.⁴⁵ However, during this Summit another two Framework Agreements were signed with

⁴⁴ www.MRE.gov.py

⁴⁵ <http://www.minagri.gob.ar/>

Syria and Palestinian National Authority. In the first case, the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the subsequent Syrian crisis has prevented to start negotiations. In the latter, negotiations between MERCOSUR and Palestine derived in a Free Trade Agreement, subscribed in December 2011 during the Mercosur Summit held in Montevideo. Nevertheless, until now, the agreement has not entered into force.

Undoubtedly, the most relevant treaty was the interregional Framework Agreement signed by Mercosur and GCC. It was subscribed during the First Summit of ASPA in Brasilia (2005) and its terms are almost the same that the agreement Mercosur-Egypt. The first negotiation round took place in Riyadh, in November 2005. A chronogram for the negotiations towards a Free Trade Agreement between GCC and Mercosur, which should have been concluded by 2006, was established, pending consultations with Member States.⁴⁶ The III Negotiation Meeting was finally held in January 2007. Since 2008, with a context of crisis, Latin American governments aimed to attract petrodollars, in search for diversification. They even launched a Gulf-Latin America Leaders Council to attract funds from the subregion. During the Doha ASPA Summit (2009), was signed a joint declaration in which the two sides stressed the necessity of starting negotiations regarding signing of a free trade agreement. All Mercosur members⁴⁷ already ratified the Agreement, but it still not into force because GCC did not ratified it yet.

The last initiative was from Tunisia, during the Third Summit of ASPA the president Moncef Marzouki remarked “the importance of building an economic system that allow this group of countries to set the bases for a real cooperation, to achieve development and social justice and to foster collaboration...”. In that context, president Marzouki announced that Tunisia is interested in the signature of an Agreement with Mercosur, in order to strengthen economic ties and to ease international trade with the block. Recently, in the joint communiqué of the Summit of Presidents and Heads of State of Mercosur in December 2014 the block expressed its satisfaction for the subscription of the Framework Agreement between Mercosur and Tunisia as a way to renew and impulse bilateral relations.⁴⁸ In the same conference the subscription of a Memorandum of Understanding between Mercosur and Lebanon in order to “promote and foster economic and commercial relations between the two parties” was saluted.

b) GCC and CELAC

Due the recent creation of CELAC it has not been able to create a specific dialogue with the LAS countries. On the other hand, lack of GCC comparable institutional structure with Unasur. However they initiated an approach that anticipates future inter-regional relationship development. In 2012 and 2013 CELAC Ministerial Troika met with GCC representatives. Moreover, the Secretary General of the CEG, Abdul Latif bin Rashed Al Zayani, was invited to attend the Second Summit of CELAC in La Havana in 2014. In the Havana Final declaration relations with the CGE were mentioned among the future international activities of CELAC and the need to develop a roadmap to establish stronger relations was highlighted (point 74). On the other hand, in the last CELAC Summit in Belen (2015) the CELAC leaders agreed to boost relations with extra-regional partners and specifically mentioned the Arab League (point 77), but so far no evidence that have taken concrete actions

⁴⁶ March, 2006, in Buenos Aires: First negotiating meeting; May, 2006, in the GCC: Second negotiating meeting; June, 2006, in Mercosur: Third negotiating meeting.

⁴⁷ Venezuela not included.

⁴⁸ http://www.puntofocal.gov.ar/doc/com_ee-pp-asoc_dic-2014.pdf

5.2. Non-Governmental transregional exchanges.

The three LAC-Arab summits held at the inter-governmental level since 2005, most recently in 2012, and the search by Arab leaderships for new models and partnerships following the dramatic uprisings of 2011 have been internationally noted. While the emphasis of much of this activity has been on the validity or otherwise of Latin American economic development models to the reform and global integration needs of the Arab world, above all in resisting or redressing the negative impacts of the recent global financial crisis, the emergence of new social and religious partnerships across the Atlantic Ocean has received less attention. Links between regions as geographically distant as the Arab world and Latin America can be forged either by top-down inter-governmental relations at a bilateral or trans-regional level, or by private sector, migration flows or other forms of circulation.

5.2.1. Council for the Arab relations with Latin America (CARLAC)

This is a recent non-governmental initiative to strengthen relations between both regions. It aims to consolidate links between LAC and MENA, mainly through the participation and inclusion of private actors. In July 2010 a Forum on Peace in Middle East was held in Dominican Republic, sponsored by FUNGLODE. The Second meeting took place in March 2011 in Costa Rica and in December of the same year took place the Third conference in (Cartagena) Colombia. These conferences gathered leaders from regions, Latin America and MENA, civil society organizations and private stakeholders. The Cartagena's meeting was called "Arab Latin American International Forum, building an alliance for development and peace", and in its final Declaration referred to economic and cultural issues and highlighted the necessity to create a Council for the Arab relations with Latin America, which *"will be the driving force in building an intensified and expanded Arab-Latin American partnership"*.

The fourth and last Arab - Latin American International Forum took place in Abu Dhabi, in December 2012. In this occasion the CARLAC was officially created, and it was developed mainly to give continuity to the Forum and to elaborate an Action Plan as a guideline for future meetings. The Council will have a directive board and it will work in close collaboration with the Centre of Latin American Studies of the University of Jordan, FUNGLODE, other universities, chambers of commerce and civil society organizations. Dr. Leonel Fernandez, ex-president of Dominican Republic and FUNGLODE founder, was elected as CARLAC president. The Council will also count with ten Latin American and ten Arab leaders. The main aim is to promote Arab-Latin American cooperation and to further develop bilateral ties. Three main areas will be priorities: trade, culture and common vision on global issues.

In February 2014, the first meeting of CARLAC took place in Dominican Republic. Its president remarked that the main difference in comparison with other similar initiatives is that the Council will focus on interregional connections with the participation of non-state actors.⁴⁹ In the Final Declaration six thematic working groups were created including; Food security and agriculture; Investments and finances; Tourism and travels; Education and culture; Energy; Infrastructure and technological innovation. Additionally, it was decided the creation of four Arab-Latin American relation Centers, two in Latin America and two in MENA countries. These centers will be non-governmental institutions and "will carry our research and analysis of policies in order

⁴⁹ http://www.funglode.org/?post_type=notice&p=8424

to involve companies, governments, civil society, media and the academic world in key issues for both regions”.⁵⁰

5.2.2. *Migrants and Converts*

Many LAC countries, particularly Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico, host important migrant populations of Arab descent, mainly from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, some of them settled for many decades,⁵¹ since the Americas were the preferred destination for Eastern Mediterranean migrations from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Migrants travelled to emerging economies in the United States and LAC in pursuit of commercial and labor market opportunities, with migration flows peaking between 1900 and 1910 and later between 1920 and 1929 (Khater 2001; Karam 2005; Pastor 2009). During this second peak, the financial crises of 1921 and 1929 had spurred a tightening of migration legislation in the US, which deflected circulation towards LAC. Other factors that encouraged movement from the US to LAC were avoidance of the draft into the American army during WWI and WWII, the eager Catholic market for Holy Land articles of faith peddled by Palestinian vendors, and the dynamics of chain migration in which people travel to join family and friends (Fahreltold 2014, Gojman de Bacal 2014, Gualtieri 2007, Norris 2011). Brazil, received about 400,000 migrants, Argentina approximately 350,000, Mexico and Haiti some 35,000, Venezuela around 15,000; the US received a total of around 400,000. Chile and Honduras received the bulk of migrants leaving British Palestine before 1948. The migration flows have been almost unidirectional, and only in the last years some South American workers have settle down in cities like Dubai or Abu Dhabi, mainly attracted for job opportunities.

Some studies estimated that the Arab Diasporas in South America are around 15 and 20 million people, counting immigrants and descendants. These human flows generated strong cultural relations that in many countries have been strengthened by the establishment of schools of Arab language, mosques or cultural centers. These populations cultivated processes of participation in the economies and societies of LAC, but also economic, political and affective ties to their homelands in the Eastern Mediterranean countries, contributing to the consolidation processes of Arab nationalism ideologies and political institutions (Logroño 2008, Pastor 2009, Bailony 2015). Crucially, they also cultivated links among themselves in the diaspora (the *mahjar* in Arabic), producing a regional transnational press in Arabic language, and numerous regional and even global institutions like the Union Libanese Mundial (Castro Farias 1965). Today, the descendants of these migrants number many million people, with the largest communities where economic growth and expansion have become a key regional dynamic over the past decade. In states with political cultures that have afforded migrant political participation, they attained important political leadership by the 1990's, for example President Carlos Menem in Argentina (1889-1999), President Carlos Flores Facusse in Honduras in (19982002) or President Jorge Jamil Mahuad Witt in Ecuador (1998-2000). In countries engaged in building political and economic ties to the Arab world, Arab migrants and descendants of migrants have been invoked and instrumentalized as “natural” mediators to these processes, notably in public policy in Brazil and Venezuela (Karam 2004, Pastor 2013).

Religious links and exchanges also have been emerging in the region as a result of new conversions to Islam, which due to their incorporation of local cultural norms and

⁵⁰ http://www.funlode.org/?post_type=notice&p=8436

⁵¹ For instance, in two occasions (1872 and 1876) the Emperor Pedro II do Brazil visited Lebanon, Palestine and Syria to promote immigration to Brazil. But he was the last Brazilian head of state to visit Middle East until 2003.

intra-regional links has to an increasing extent become indigenized in the integration of migrant and Latin American communities. This process highlights the importance of human agency in establishing and extending links which initially escape the inter-governmental dimension, and which are multiple both, in terms of the cultures within which they have arisen, and the theological interpretations of Islam from which they draw. Islam has grown by leaps and bounds in Latin America and among Latinos in the United States in the past three decades. Most of this expansion has happened through conversion and can be traced to the transnational institutionalization of Muslim religious practice in the region. Understanding Latin American Islam requires understanding the transnational structuring of conversion to Islam in Latin America—a process which spans Argentina, the US, Central America, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. Across the Americas, the internet has played a crucial role in making Islam available to the public beyond the aggressive Islamophobia of conventional media like the press and television, and as a space of socialization into the faith for new converts (Pastor, 2011; Logroño, 2015). In fact, the conversion of young men is largely patterned on thirdworldist solidarities reminiscent of anti-imperialist LAC nationalisms (Pastor, 2011; Pinto, 2015).

Mexico is an interesting case study, where no mosques existed before the 1980's, an initial handful of converts who embraced Islam as economic migrants in the United States have joined a small historical Lebanese Shia migration and Spanish proselytizing converts in founding spaces of worship. The new mosques, *musallas* and *tariqas* make Islam a presence in Mexican public space, attracting new conversions and fuelling the growth of Mexican Muslim communities. As these become more numerous and more aware of the diversity of practice and interpretation in Islam, new spaces of worship and *dawa*—of invitation to the faith—have been established. In the past two years, two new Sufi orders and a Shia community have been established in Mexico City and its environs and are already developing headquarters in other large and medium sized urban centers in Mexico. This most recent growth has occurred through the presence of young religious leaders with formative links to Argentinian Islam. In the same period, new proselytizing efforts such as the Turkish *Fetulla Gullen* initiative have also developed a visible and effective presence in Mexico. The institutionalization of diversity has occurred in synergy with the fragmentation of the initial convert communities. As converts acquire religious expertise through contact with fellow Muslims online and in historically Muslim regions where some have received religious education, they increasingly assert a Mexican or a Latino Islam as distinctive and establish institutions with specific theological traditions and socio-demographic profiles (Pastor, 2015).

Migrant businessmen—often diplomats and former diplomats—who are members of the Cámara Libanesa de Comercio, founded by migrant notables in 1926, are at the forefront of the Halal Certification process in Mexico. They have been extremely active in collaboration with local consumers of halal products, who are mostly converts to Islam, developing a legal and business platform to enable a transition towards halal production in time to meet the 2015 enforcement of halal certification in food exports to the Arab World and Muslim countries beyond. The Cámara Árabe de Comercio, established by an Egyptian businessman and Mexican businessmen and diplomats in the 1980's, is also particularly active in cultivating business networks transregionally.

6. Seeking drivers and opportunities for inter-regional cooperation

Regionalism in LAC and the Arab world has followed different paths making their asymmetric realities difficult to compare. The multipolar context and the diffusion of power have been a stimulus of regionalism and inter-regionalism between the two regions however, along with the revival of South-South cooperation in the context of the emergence of the South and greater autonomy new emerging powers. If in the past the non-aligned movement was an engine for cooperation, today the Global South is seeking greater autonomy and using regionalism and inter-regionalism as instruments in the adaptation of emerging powers to a post-hegemonic and multipolar context.

Migration flows mainly from the Arab world to the New World were relevant during the XIX and XX century, but the institutional relationship is very recent. The distance and lack of economic and political priority have not favored exchanges and the creation of strong links in the past. Common features, for example, the fact that both regions were historically subsumed in empires -the Spanish and Portuguese on one side and the Ottoman on the other- result in a relatively homogeneity in cultural and political features within each region acting as facilitators of regional integration, constructed in a post-colonial context. These regions are just beginning to know each other better. But language barriers, different traditions and misperceptions of the other region are still present. Student exchanges between schools, universities or research centers and the creation of interregional studies are extremely important to build knowledge networks. Both regions have large sectors of young population; this can be regarded as a great asset, but also as a challenge, as this workforce will require better and suitable jobs. Unemployment in South America declined in the last ten years, but jobs remain very low quality. In the Arab world, youth unemployment remains high and the lack of opportunities for youth is prevalent in North Africa countries. These are common challenges.

Intra-regional disputes within each region make internal consensus a difficult task. In the Arab world political crisis is a heavy burden. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the continuation of war in Syria and most recently, the conflict in Yemen are obstacles to regional integration affecting the relationship with other regions. Furthermore, the current regional crisis caused by the appearance of ISIS requires enormous efforts from Arab countries trying to contain the situation. In South America, there are few inter-state struggles but disputes occur in the treatment of some important issues. Among them is the discrepancy on development models between Pacific Alliance member countries such as Mexico, Chile or Colombia, more aligned with liberal theories and protectionist Mercosur governments, like Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina. These differences have prevented a common trade agenda in LAC.

The weak institutional development of regional organizations in both areas and the structure of intergovernmental decision-making determine the logic of Summitry dominating the development of interregional initiatives and the difficult implementation of decisions. Regionalism in Latin America is more developed and complex than in LAS and more advanced in the process of economic integration, albeit imperfect. However, it appears that neither region will follow a supranational European model since both regions share a strong sovereignty's nationalism. They also share an anti-hegemonic position in front traditional powers and anti-interventionist stance.

We have clearly seen the inter-regional relations grew from the beginning of the last decade, especially after 2005, when the First ASPA Summit was held. Besides

multilateral fora, bilateral relations, particularly between the countries of South America and members of LAS were also developed. The inter-regionalism serves to affirm the actorness of regional institutions and seek partnerships. The political consensus has had some results in international forums like the United Nations on issues like Palestine or in a region Malvinas has supported claims of the other. Political inter-regionalism has managed to turn the economic exchange between the two regions, although only moderately. As previously examined the relationships were driven not only by a growing trade but also by investments, agreements, meetings, visits by senior officials, however, these relationships are far from being relevant or priority for both regions. Levels of interregional trade have grown steadily, but remain low. Cross-investments also increased but is dispersed and focused only in some areas and sectors.

Barriers to trade are also lack of inter-connections and insufficient infrastructure capacity for exports. This would require investment in port facilities and the creation of centers and other targeted infrastructure to facilitate this exchange. This in turn requires political commitment to interregional ties. Efforts to negotiate preferential trade agreements have been limited and few of them have come into force. However, there have been a significant progress from the previous situation without an inter-regional legal framework and, when effectively implemented, can be a push factor to improve the relationship and have some impact on governance and regulatory convergence in the South Atlantic. Infrastructure limitations might potentially be overcome through the instrumentalization of other regionalisms and free trade agreements- for example, using NAFTA to facilitate export-import trade between Mexico and the Arab World, as Israel has successfully done.

The limited connections between the two regions are an obstacle to increase inter-regional human and commodity flows. In 2003, Lula Da Silva stressed this point in his speech in Egypt, saying that direct flights between Arab and South American countries should be established. At that time Brazil had no direct flights to any Arab country, now Qatar Airlines, Etihad Airways and Emirates Airlines fly directly to Sao Paulo. The latter also offers direct flights to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. However, airlines should be encouraged to offer direct flights to most cities in both regions.

Complementarities for investments are detected: basically South America needs investments for infrastructure and innovation and Arab countries need food. Mutual knowledge must be promoted in order to create a solid basis for trade and investment. It is important to encourage the creation and development of the Chambers of Commerce to facilitate exchanges and foster negotiations between stakeholders in the two regions. For example, in Chile and Mexico, the Arab Chamber of Commerce in synergy with Lebanese converts facilitated the halal certification. Private initiatives such CARLAC are the best complement to public relationship and can enhance the dialogue between the two regions and the involvement of other sectors of society as entrepreneurs, businesses and other members of civil society. There has been an increasing participation of non-intergovernmental actors, but still there are huge opportunities to further develop contacts between South America and Arab countries. Large Diaspora and people with Arab origins in LAC countries can serve as an important link between the two regions.

In conclusion, although there are opportunities and complementarities between the two regions, they have not been fully explored. The interregional rapprochement which began ten years ago has promoted a significant increase in mutual trade, investment and diplomatic contact however and cultural exchanges have intensified. This process, supported by governments in both regions, has contributed to the diversification of trade links consolidating regional actorness and greater autonomy in the multipolar

world and would contribute to the governance of the South Atlantic Space. Civil society involvement is also crucial in order to strengthen links between the two regions and to promote convergence of values and intercultural and interreligious understanding. The EU has strategic partnerships with both regions that have been developed through cooperation plans and projects. The possibility of triangular cooperation to spread good practice experiences taking advantage of the new interregional links should be explored.

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