

The philosophies of regional integration: European Union, Mercosur, Bricsⁱ


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Abstract

For many decades, the forms of regional integration in Europe were presented as the ideal-typical model for all other integration experiences worldwide, including in Latin America. Today, however, the picture has changed dramatically. The European Union is undergoing a genuine “organic crisis.” This is not a conjunctural crisis, linked to one of the many recurring emergencies affecting the Old Continent, but rather a structural crisis that strikes at the very core of its legitimacy: the welfare state, increasingly sacrificed in the name of a war economy. It is precisely in this context that there is a need to attempt a bold “knight’s move” by initiating a dialogue with the BRICS, which represent an innovative form of integration among states belonging to different regional areas of the world.

Keywords: regional integration; organic crisis; welfare state; Brics; Mercosur.

As filosofias de integração regional: União Europeia, Mercosul, Brics

Resumo

Por muitas décadas, as formas de integração regional na Europa foram apresentadas como o modelo ideal-típico para as demais experiências de integração regional no mundo, inclusive na América Latina. Entretanto, hoje o quadro mudou drasticamente. A União Europeia atravessa uma verdadeira “crise orgânica”. Não se trata de uma crise conjuntural, ligada a uma das múltiplas emergências que periodicamente atingem o Velho Continente, mas de uma crise estrutural que atinge o núcleo da sua legitimidade: o Estado social sacrificado em nome de uma economia de guerra. É precisamente nesse contexto que se faz necessário ousar um verdadeiro “movimento de cavalo”, abrindo um diálogo com os BRICS, que representam uma forma inovadora de integração entre Estados pertencentes a diferentes áreas regionais do mundo.

Palavras-chave: integração regional; crise orgânica; estado social; Brics; Mercosul.

1 Introduction

The prevailing doctrine tends to emphasize the analogies between regional integration in Europe and Latin America, sometimes leading to a genuine overlap between the two. Based on the premise that the European Union would constitute the ideal and paradigmatic model, this doctrine proposes the application to the Latin American experience of categories and principles foreign to its historical trajectory. This is a phenomenon of "constitutional imitation" that ignores the peculiarities of each process. An emblematic example is the reference to Mercosur's so-called community law, made despite the absence of a central feature of European integration, supranationality, an attribute that is notably absent from the institutional organization of Mercosur¹.

This essay, on the contrary, aims to highlight the differences and originalities of each integration experience, considering their historical, geographical, socio-economic and cultural contexts. It starts from the conviction that only from this perspective will it be possible to think fruitfully about a dialogue between the two forms of regional integration². The fundamental difference, often overlooked by Eurocentric doctrine, is that European countries were colonizing powers, while Latin American countries were colonized by those very same Europeans.

France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands began the process of European integration when they ceased to be colonial "empires." Post-war European reconstruction, facilitated by the Marshall Plan (1947)³, started with already industrialized economies, with advanced infrastructure and some experience in cooperation, albeit

¹ See: VENTURA, Deisy de Freitas Lima. *Direito comunitário do Mercosul*. São Paulo: APGIQ, 1997; NASCIMENTO, Claudia Lyra. O dilema da incorporação das normas do Mercosul no ordenamento jurídico brasileiro. *Revista de Informação Legislativa*, v. 43, n. 172, p. 175-184, 2006; SÁNCHEZ, Alberto M. *Derecho de la integración: un recorrido múltiple por las experiencias de la Unión Europea y del Mercosur*. Buenos Aires: RAP, 2004; SALDANHA, Jânia Maria Lopes. *Cooperação jurisdicional: reenvio prejudicial: um mecanismo de direito processual a serviço do direito comunitário. Perspectivas para sua adoção no Mercosul*. Porto Alegre: Ed. Livraria do Advogado, 2001.

² In the same direction: CARDUCCI, Michele. Le integrazioni regionali dell'America latina: fra "pre-teorie" dell'integrazione, filosofie costituzionali europee e universalismo costituzionale latino. *Eunomia. Rivista semestrale di Storia e Politica Internazionali*, [s. l.], n. 1, p. 319-366, 2015; MACEDO, Paulo Emílio Vauthier Borges de. The Foundational Myth of Mercosur and the European Union Analogy. *German Law Journal*, n. 20, p. 734-747, 2019; GALINDO, Bruno. *Teoria intercultural da constituição: a transformação paradigmática da teoria da constituição diante da integração interestatal na União Europeia e no Mercosul*. Porto Alegre: Livraria do Advogado, 2006; MALAMUD, Andrés. Latin American Regionalism and EU Studies¹. *Journal of European Integration*, v. 32, n. 6, p. 637-657, 2010.

³ The Marshall Plan provided significant funding from the US for the reconstruction of European cities, but on the condition that communist parties be excluded from national governments.

marked by historical rivalries. These countries maintained privileged access to raw materials and foreign markets, including through their former colonies. From the outset, the founding states, starting with France, demanded that their own colonies and overseas territories be associated with the new European Economic Community⁴.

It is worth remembering that the Schuman Declaration, the cornerstone of European integration, stated that the development of the African continent was an essential objective of Europe (European Union, 1950)⁵. This statement was not limited to an altruistic or supportive gesture: it also meant preserving strategic ties with former colonies and African territories, guaranteeing markets for raw materials, and ensuring political and military control over regions that might otherwise fall under Soviet influence.

Latin American countries, on the other hand, were former colonies that gained their independence in the 19th century. This process was complex and heterogeneous. In Hispanic America, independence occurred through a revolutionary and "militarized" process, which resulted in the fragmentation of the Spanish empire and the emergence of several nation-states, endowed with republican constitutions, but marked by strong political instability and internal conflicts⁶. In Brazil, there was a conservative independence, characterized essentially by the transfer of the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro and the maintenance of much of the social, economic, and administrative structure of the colonial period⁷.

The fragmentation of Hispanic America and Brazilian "centralization" generated two distinct horizons of regional integration: on the one hand, a mosaic of Hispanic states marked by historical rivalries and colonial scars; on the other, an autonomous Brazil, an expression of geographical and political protagonism, but relatively isolated, whose leadership is still accepted with reservations by other countries. Thus, regional integration

⁴ Part IV of the Treaty of Rome created the "Overseas Countries and Territories Association" regime. The association provided for: preferential access for exports from these territories to the European market; funding from the European Development Fund (EDF) for local projects; and the gradual opening of the territories to European exports.

⁵ For further reading: HANSEN, Peo, JONSSON, Stefan. *Eurafrica: the untold history of european integration and colonialism*. Londres: Bloomsbury, 2014.

⁶ Seer: CHIARAMONTE, José Carlos. *Nación y Estado en Iberoamérica: el lenguaje político en tiempos de las independencias*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2004; LYNCH, John. *Las revoluciones hispanoamericanas 1808-1826*. Madrid: Editorial Ariel.

⁷ See the classic by BUARQUE DE HOLANDA, Sergio. *Raízes do Brasil*. 27. ed. São Paulo: Companhia das letras, 1995.

processes in Latin America still bear the weight of colonial legacies: high social inequality, strong land concentration, restricted political and economic elites, limited industrial and technological base, and high vulnerability to external shocks⁸.

2 The different value of national sovereignty

From this fundamental difference, it becomes possible to understand the distinct approaches to the question of national sovereignty.

After the two world wars, which some historians have described as the collective suicide of Europe⁹, European political and intellectual elites came to consider state sovereignty in an "absolute" sense as one of the structural causes of "total war" and Nazism-Fascism. Aggressive nationalism paved the way for the total mobilization of society and the economy, culminating in the outbreak of inter-imperial war. Hans Kelsen, for example, argued that international law should become the new sovereign subject of the postwar world, capable of legally limiting the powers of states and preventing new systemic conflicts (Kelsen, 1990, p. 230).

Aware of this tragic past, the process of European integration sought to transfer portions of sovereignty to supranational institutions, a form of "shared sovereignty," especially in the economic sphere and, ideally, in the political sphere¹⁰.

The federal philosophy of European integration, as envisioned in Altiero Spinelli's utopian Ventotene Manifesto, never materialized. With the division of Europe into two blocs, the future European federation could only involve pro-American Western Europe, thus excluding that area of Central Europe which had traditionally always been part of European civilization. Furthermore, within Western European states, political support for

⁸ See: SANTOS, Milton. *Por uma outra globalização: do pensamento único à consciência universal*. São Paulo: Record, 2000.

⁹ See: HOBBSAWM, Eric. *Era dos extremos*. São Paulo: Companhia das letras, 1995.

¹⁰ Supranational integration was an antidote to unrestricted sovereignty. In this sense, Article 11 of the Italian Constitution is emblematic: while it affirms that sovereignty belongs to the people, it also recognizes that those same people may consent, under conditions of reciprocity, to limit national sovereignty in favor of supranational legal orders aimed at peace and justice among nations. This formulation also reflects the communist political tradition: as Antonio Gramsci famously stated, "the ultimate goal is internationalism, but the point of departure is national sovereignty." (Gramsci, 2000, p. 225, author's translation).

European federal plans was weak due to opposition from the right (defenders of national sovereignty) and the left (particularly the communist parties), which did not welcome European integration as an anti-Soviet bastion.

The “functionalist” philosophy, unlike the “federalist” one, has always made a point of relegating to the background the question of the constitutional approach to the European integration process and its long-term institutional implications. The founding fathers of the European Community and the proponents of “Monnetian”-inspired functionalism shared with “federalist Europeanism” the “ultimate goal” of “Federation”. However, the Federation they aspired to did not foresee any constitutional-state structure (a “Federation without a State”), and its realization was entrusted to a long-term, gradual, empirical, and incremental process¹¹.

In Latin American countries, the trajectory is almost opposite. National sovereignty was not the “problem to overcome,” but the central objective, a symbol of political emancipation, economic autonomy, and international dignity. In integration processes (Mercosur, Andean Community, UNASUR), the preservation of national sovereignty was an explicit principle that often hindered institutional progress. This different conception of sovereignty is reflected at the institutional level. The EU has combined supranational institutions, capable of making binding decisions on member states (Commission, Court of Justice, Central Bank), with intergovernmental institutions (European Council). Latin American integration, in general, has a low degree of delegation of powers, with an intergovernmental model predominating.

At the same time, based on an awareness of a shared history marked by the experience of dictatorships supported by “external” actors, a supranational jurisdiction focused on the protection of human rights was consolidated in Latin America, inspired by

¹¹ Europe — as stated in the aforementioned Schuman Declaration — “will not be made all at once, nor will it be built according to a single plan; it will arise through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity [...]” (União europeia, 1950, author’s translation). According to the postulate known as (functional and political) spillover, the integration of a given economic sector (originally the merger of coal and steel production, later the establishment of a free trade area) generates the need, due to the interconnections among different sectors, for further cooperation in areas not initially foreseen (for example, in the transport sector). The “technical” impossibility of isolating one sector from another thus creates pressures to extend cooperation from one field to another, making the integration process “automatic” and “self-propelling.”

the European model of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)¹². Based on the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José, Costa Rica, signed in 1969), the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) has developed the doctrine of “conventionality control,” which imposes on States Parties the duty to respect conventional rights and to adapt domestic law to guarantee them¹³. In addition, the State party must ensure the effective implementation of the treaty provisions, guaranteeing that no domestic law or act undermines the rights enshrined in the treaties. An emblematic case of conflict between constitutional law and conventional law was the case relating to amnesty (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2010)¹⁴.

3 Welfare state and neoliberal integration

While relinquishing some of their sovereign prerogatives to build the institutions of a supranational market, the six founding states of the EEC decided to retain control over monetary and fiscal policy. Currency and budget were the fundamental levers for preserving the integrity of their social welfare systems, whose consolidation had contributed to the democratic legitimization of the national ruling classes in the post-World War II era. In this sense, the liberalization of trade in the European space coexisted with the conviction that only nation-states had the legitimacy to define redistributive social policies aimed at correcting the dysfunctions generated by the supranational market itself (Losurdo, 2016, p. 25).

The strengthening of a robust welfare state in Europe was favored by an important geopolitical factor. The Keynesian social contract, which articulates a virtuous

¹²Recently, CYRILLO, Carolina. Quatro ensaios sobre o constitucionalismo sul-americano. Rio de Janeiro: NIDH, 2024; LEGALE, Siddharta. A Corte Interamericana de Direitos Humanos como Tribunal constitucional. Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Juris, 2019.

¹³FITERMAN TEDESCO, Thomaz. A questão da última palavra nas Cortes europeias e interamericana de direitos humanos: da margem de apreciação ao controle de convencionalidade. Master's Thesis (PUC-SP), 2019; MAZZUOLI, Valerio de Oliveira. Teoria geral do controle de convencionalidade no direito brasileiro. Revista de Informação Legislativa, Brasília, DF, ano 46, n. 181, p. 113-139, jan./mar. 2009.

¹⁴In 2010, the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) affirmed the compatibility of the Amnesty Law with the Brazilian Constitution. According to the Brazilian Supreme Court, this law implied a broad, general, and unrestricted pardon, as well as representing the "essential condition for the process of reconciliation and redemocratization of the country" (Supreme Federal Court, 2010). The Inter-American Court, on the contrary, stated that these are crimes against humanity that are imprescriptible under international law and not subject to amnesty.

balance between the market and the welfare state, resulted from a dialectical dynamic marked by the confrontation between the two blocs during the Cold War. The ideological influence and the example of the Soviet Union's economic model exerted pressure on the West, leading it to adopt and expand social welfare policies, not only as an instrument of development, but also as a means of ensuring political legitimacy and internal cohesion.

This geopolitical factor was reflected in the international order created by the Bretton Woods agreements (1944), which was based on a balance between progressive trade liberalization through the elimination of tariff and regulatory barriers (through GATT) and strong limits on the free movement of capital to ensure economic autonomy. This allowed nation states (not only in Europe) to preserve their most important national industries and strengthen their welfare states, without the constant threat of capital flight or currency crises.

The Economic and Monetary Union (created by the Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1993) was the logical complement to the European single market and, at the same time, a consequence of the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, when the “Pandora's box” of free and unrestricted capital movement was opened. The promise of the euro was to shield Europe from shocks emanating from global markets. However, by internalizing the logic of the German economic constitution, marked by “competitive austerity,” the common market became a disciplinary mechanism that increasingly conditioned the economic sovereignty of member states (Losurdo, 2016, p. 7).

In the words of Wolfgang Streeck, the “European Union has become a liberalization machine” (Streeck, 2014, p. 161), fulfilling Friedrich von Hayek’s “prophecy”. In an essay published in 1945, this author highlighted the reasons why the establishment of an “international federation of states” (Von Hayek, 1939) would inevitably evolve towards market liberalization, with the elimination of all tariff and regulatory barriers.

Firstly, the existence of a «shared economic system» in which the free movement of factors of production is guaranteed would severely limit the scope and capacity for public intervention by nation states. Any internal regulatory measure restricting such freedoms of movement would conflict with “federal” law and be challenged by other member states. This could even lead to the extreme case where a state would be unable

to impose “regulatory restrictions on child labor or working time regulations” (Von Hayek, 1939, p. 138).

Secondly, market regulation interventions could not easily be transferred to the supranational level either. Within a federation of states, the diversity of interests is greater than that existing within a single state, and the sense of belonging to a collective identity in the name of which public redistribution interventions are legitimized is weaker. Is it plausible—Hayek ironically questioned—that:

a French farmer would be willing to pay more for fertilizer to help British industry? Would a Swedish worker be willing to pay more for oranges to support Californian farmers? Or would a London City employee be willing to pay more for their shoes or bicycle to help Belgian workers? (Von Hayek, 1939, p. 140, author’s translation).

It is no coincidence that Mercosur emerged at a time when the EU was already moving towards Economic and Monetary Union¹⁵. The “spirit” of post-war European integration, based on a constitutional balance between the free market and the welfare state, was already weakening, replaced by a neoliberal logic based on hyper-competition, financial stability, and a completely independent Central Bank¹⁶.

It is reasonable to ask whether Mercosur, created at the height of the Washington Consensus, ended up imitating this post-Maastricht neoliberal version more than the European social model of the 1950s–1970s.

The answer is less obvious than one might suppose. Within Mercosur, the free movement of people has had more concrete results than the free movement of goods. Since the Agreement on Residence for Nationals of the Member States of Mercosur (2002), citizens of member states can reside, work, and settle in another country of the bloc with reduced bureaucratic requirements. In practice, this means they can travel through the territory of the other Member States using only identity documents, without

¹⁵With the Treaty of Asunción (1991), Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay established the Southern Common Market. The Ouro Preto Protocol (1994) gave the bloc legal personality and an institutional structure.

¹⁶The European Central Bank was conceived as a federal body, independent of both national governments and other European institutions (Article 130 TEU). This independence has “constitutional” significance, as it is enshrined in treaties that can only be revised with the consent of all Member States and is even exempt from internal constitutional review processes.

needing a passport. In addition, nationals of one State who obtain residence in another are entitled to equal treatment with citizens of the host country in terms of civil, economic, social, and labor rights. This social dimension, which is often underestimated, is one of Mercosur's concrete achievements, comparable to European instruments such as the right of residence and work in any member state.

On the other hand, although the Treaty of Asunción provided for the establishment of a common market, trade integration was weakened by several factors. Firstly, due to strong economic asymmetries: Brazil, the largest economy and holder of a vast territory, concentrates strategic production chains and plays a dominant role. This has led to a growing list of exceptions to the free movement of goods and the Common External Tariff (CET), used mainly by smaller countries (Paraguay, Uruguay) to protect vulnerable sectors or seek bilateral agreements outside the bloc. Also, Brazil's leadership, not always perceived as cooperative, encouraged these countries' tendency to demand more flexible rules¹⁷.

While Mercosur achieved concrete progress in terms of the free movement of people, the construction of the common market revealed weaknesses on the economic front. This was compounded by the inadequacy of income redistribution mechanisms. While the European Union attempted to compensate for the complete opening of markets with robust structural cohesion funds, Mercosur introduced only the “Fund for Mercosur Structural Convergence” (FOCEM). This instrument sought to reduce regional disparities, but according to several authors, it functioned more as a political gesture inspired by the European model than as an effective compensation mechanism, due to limited resources and the absence of strong institutionalization (Fiori, 2007).

This structural asymmetry, which limits the depth of integration within Mercosur, helps explain the nature of the interregional dialogue between the EU and Mercosur. It is therefore not surprising that, after more than 25 years of negotiations, on December 6, 2024, the European Union and Mercosur signed a comprehensive economic agreement with a strong commercial focus, covering tariffs, rules of origin, services, intellectual property, and environmental sustainability.

¹⁷See: MONTEIRO, Irving Rocha Lopes; FEIRA, Luiza Cristina de Castro; GONÇALVES, Jonas Rodrigo. Mercosul: problemas estruturais e o dilema da classificação frente aos modelos de bloco econômico. *Revista JRG de Estudos Acadêmicos*, São Paulo, Ano 6, v. VI, n. 12, p. 199-215, jan./jul. 2023.

The EU–Mercosur agreement was conceived within an essentially neoliberal logic, whose focus is the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, with the aim of expanding trade and investment, without robust social protection mechanisms¹⁸. Paradoxically, it was not Mercosur that blocked its ratification, but the European Union itself, due to internal differences, especially between France and Germany, the two main countries in the bloc¹⁹. While Germany supports the agreement, projecting significant gains for its industrial sectors, particularly automotive and chemical, France and Poland oppose it, demanding the inclusion of a safeguard clause that would allow the suspension of agricultural imports (such as beef, chicken, and sugar) if these cause impacts on domestic markets or fail to meet sanitary and environmental standards.

4 The "organic crisis" of the European Union

For many decades, forms of regional integration in Europe were presented as the ideal model for any other regional integration experience in the world (Carducci, 2015, p. 322). Supranationality was seen as the key to the success of the European Union because of its ability to overcome “small” national interests. It was argued that supranational institutions, such as the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the Court of Justice, could make decisions that synthesized national wills, translating them into a truly “community” interest. It is true that such institutions might lack direct democratic legitimacy, but they would be endowed with bureaucratic legitimacy, based on the good results produced for citizens, results attributed to the technical skills that only these institutions would possess.

Today, however, the picture has changed dramatically. The European Union faces a real “organic crisis” in the Gramscian sense. This is not a cyclical crisis linked to one of the many emergencies affecting the Old Continent, but a structural crisis that strikes at the heart of its dual legitimacy²⁰. Since the “sovereign debt crisis,” supranational

¹⁸For further information, see: SILVA, Marcos Aurélio da. Accordo UE-Mercosur: uno sguardo dall’America-Latina. *Fuori Collana*, [S. l.], n. 25, 23 Gen. 2025. Available at: <https://fuoricollana.it/accordo-ue-mercotur-uno-sguardo-dallamerica-latina/?print=print>. Accessed on: September 1, 2025.

¹⁹After signing, the text underwent legal review and translation into the 24 official EU languages, which normally prepares the ground for ratification. However, its formal presentation to the Member States for ratification was postponed by the European Commission.

²⁰«Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament. Member States are

institutions have been challenged by “sovereignist” movements and parties that call for a return to national sovereignty as the only remaining space for the defense of social rights. This is a fair criticism of the neoliberal paradigm which, in the absence of a genuine left-wing force capable of organizing social contradictions, ended up pushing many member states into the orbit of the far right.

The EU's "organic crisis" dates back to the technocratic management of the global economic crisis (2008-2012), when financial markets speculated against the failure of the countries disparagingly labeled "PIIGS". This was an emergency measure that disregarded the rule of law itself, through intergovernmental treaties outside the ordinary legal framework of the EU. In order to restore “market confidence,” the EU, on the one hand, imposed the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (Fiscal Compact, 2012), which required member states to incorporate the principle of balanced budget rule into their domestic legal systems, preferably through constitutional norms. On the other hand, it created the European Stability Mechanism (ESM, 2012), a fund of a hybrid legal nature, situated between public law and commercial law, intended to rescue Member States in difficulty. The financial assistance was, however, conditional on the implementation of strict fiscal austerity programs and structural reforms driven by the logic of hyper-competitiveness.

Greece was the main "victim" of the ESM, becoming the prototype of the "conditional welfare state". In July 2015, the government of Alexis Tsipras (of the radical left-wing party Syriza) called a popular referendum on the harsh conditions imposed by European creditors in exchange for financial assistance. In retaliation, the European Central Bank suspended emergency liquidity to Greek banks, forcing the government to impose capital controls and limit bank withdrawals. Despite the overwhelming victory of the "No" vote (61%) at the polls, Tsipras was forced to sign the Euro Summit Agreement (July 12, 2015), "accepting" even more strict conditions than those initially rejected (European Union, 2015)²¹.

represented in the European Council by their respective Heads of State or Government, who are democratically accountable both to their national parliaments and to their citizens» (European Union, 2012, Art. 10, author's translation).

²¹The spirit of this “agreement” can be summarized in these emblematic excerpts: the Greek authorities must «develop a significantly strengthened privatization program with better governance. Valuable Greek assets will be transferred to an independent fund that will monetize the assets through privatizations and

The negative effects of the fiscal austerity imposed by the Brussels institutions were clearly reflected in the response to the pandemic, which, in its initial phase, hit harder the member states that had implemented deep cuts in public health and social protection systems. More precisely, as highlighted by the prestigious journal *The Lancet*, it was a true “syndemic” (Horton, 2020, p. 874), in which the effects of the virus were compounded by structural vulnerabilities exacerbated by neoliberal globalization.

The freezing of global value chains led “creditor” states to realize the importance of strengthening the domestic market, justifying the adoption of Next Generation EU (NGEU): a major recovery program financed, for the first time, by joint European debt issuance (€750 billion). Its stated objectives were to enable ecological and digital transition, strengthen public health systems, and ensure greater territorial and social cohesion among member states. Despite the ambition to establish a federal fiscal policy, competitive logic prevailed, structurally rooted in the single market, under a redistributive logic. As a result, NGEU resources were absorbed to a greater extent by regions and cities that are already more competitive and well-organized administratively, producing the effect of widening rather than narrowing territorial and social gaps. This mismatch between expectations and concrete results confirms the structural dimension of the EU's current organic crisis: even when innovative instruments of solidarity are tried out, the neoliberal logic embedded in the DNA of post-Maastricht European integration ultimately limits their effectiveness, fueling political opposition on both the left and the right.

Finally, on February 24, 2022, history suddenly accelerated with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war²².

A pragmatic approach aimed at recognizing the mutual reasons of the antagonists and seeking mediation, as attempted with the Minsk Agreements (2015),

other means. Monetizing assets will be one of the sources for proceeding with the scheduled repayment of the new ESM loan». [...] «The Government needs to consult with the institutions and reach a timely agreement on all legislative projects in relevant areas before submitting them to public consultation or presenting them to Parliament» (European Union, 2015, author's translation).

²²The lights of peace were extinguished many years ago (Cantaro, 2023). In the Kosovo War (1999), presented as “humanitarian interference,” NATO's military intervention against Serbia occurred without authorization from the UN Security Council, violating international law. Furthermore, it destroyed the common security architecture built by the Helsinki Conference (1975). The second Gulf War (2003), similarly illegal, accentuated the strategic division within the European Union (new Europe and old Europe) and revealed the absence of a common foreign policy.

within the framework of an autonomous European strategic interest, would have been possible. However, that was not the path taken. Europe opted for an idealistic approach, creating an absolute enemy—Putin as the “new Hitler”—to be defeated without room for negotiation.

The war was the catalyst for the "organic crisis" of the European Union. Instead of reinforcing the pursuit of “strategic autonomy,” it accelerated a process of militarization subordinated to NATO logic and the rearmament dictated by Washington²³. The European project, which had been born out of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, in force in 1953) with the promise of transforming military rivalry into peaceful cooperation, became an instrument for prolonging conflict and containing Russia, sacrificing its claim to be an independent global actor. The choice of a policy aligned with US interests further undermined the internal legitimacy of supranational institutions, which came to be perceived not only as distant from citizens, but also as incapable of guaranteeing the welfare state, the value that had been their main source of legitimacy since the postwar period²⁴.

In this scenario, which for many evokes the climate of international tension that preceded the fateful year of 1914, the European Union seems "prisoner" of consolidated schemes. And yet, it is precisely now that it would be time to dare to make a real “knight's move” and turn the tables with lucidity and political courage. The countermeasure is called dialogue with the BRICS, which represents an innovative form of integration between states belonging to different regional areas of the world.

5 Conclusions - The novelty of BRICS in the multipolar scenario

Accustomed to reasoning with "Eurocentric" categories, we tend to assume that a supranational organization must necessarily be held together by a communion of

²³Initially, the EU approved the regulation on “Support for ammunition production” (2023/1525) aimed at urgently supplying Ukraine with ammunition and, if requested, missiles, as well as helping EU Member States to replenish their stocks. More recently, it adopted the “Rearm Europe/Readiness 2030” plan. A plan through which the EU intends to mobilize 800 billion euros for defense investments. Including measures such as increased defense spending and the launch of a 150 billion euro lending facility (SAFE).

²⁴It should be added that, as NATO members, all European countries, with the exception of Spain under Prime Minister Felipe Sanchez, accepted Trump's "diktat" to spend 5% of GDP on armaments, thus enriching the American military industry. This servile attitude was not enough to avoid the imposition of 15% tariffs.

"values" among its members, as in the case of the European Union (Article 2 TEU) or NATO. Therefore, we have difficulty understanding the profound essence of BRICS: a partnership that recognizes the value of the economic, social, and cultural heterogeneity of its members. This heterogeneity was further accentuated by the recent expansion of the bloc, which incorporated six new states (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and, on January 1, 2025, Indonesia). This is, therefore, a partnership embedded in a multilateral order, in which there is neither an "autopilot" that rigidly conditions the political choices of its members, nor is it desired to establish one²⁵. The BRICS challenge the so-called "liberal-democratic international order," based on rules, believing – not without reason – that these rules are, in reality, flexible according to the geopolitical and economic interests of Western countries.

The BRICS promote an alternative vision of globalization, different from the Western one that dominated the last century. A globalization geared towards building "bridges" between civilizations, instead of "walls". A globalization based on the sharing of economic and social well-being, according to a win-win logic. A globalization that aims to reduce global economic inequalities, also benefiting peoples who have been excluded until now, through the construction of large infrastructure networks and strategic connections.

The explicit challenge to the "rules-based" order is also manifested in the BRICS' desire to build, in progressive stages, a new economic and monetary system. This is a long-term project, whose final evolution could culminate in the introduction of a common currency, conceived as an alternative to the global dominance of the US dollar.

Paradoxically, it is the United States itself that is contributing to the acceleration of the "de-dollarization" process. The exceptionally long-lasting economic sanctions imposed on Russia, the exponential growth of US public debt and Treasury bond interest rates, as well as the increasing uncertainty linked to the political use of tariffs, are

²⁵ Regarding BRICS: PIMENTEL, José Vicente de Sá (org.). O Brasil, o Brics e a agenda internacional. Brasília, DF: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2013.

gradually inducing many states to reduce their exposure to Washington's debt and diversify their foreign exchange reserves, reducing the weight of the dollar²⁶.

In this context, Latin America once again becomes a strategic battleground, but no longer as a space "subordinated" to the US (the so-called "backyard" according to the Monroe Doctrine), but rather as an active player in redefining global relations. The case of the tariffs against Brazil (the highest in the world) is truly emblematic, as it suggests that the challenge to the selective universalism of the US-led order is now open. If this challenge can materialize in truly inclusive and democratic multilateral institutions and in cooperation processes based on mutual recognition, we may be able to glimpse the embryo of a new, more equitable and plural international order. Only time will tell if the BRICS countries primarily aspire to strengthen their geopolitical and geoeconomic role on the global stage, or if they also envision, at least in perspective, an alternative economic and social development model to the currently dominant neoliberal one.

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²⁶ In this context, the concerns of the United States are also reflected in Brazil's attempt to develop a Digital Currency backed by the Central Bank. A preliminary step in this direction was the introduction, in 2020, of the digital payment system Pix, administered directly by the Central Bank of Brazil. In just a few years, Pix achieved extraordinary adoption, reaching approximately 93% of the adult population and positioning itself as a tool intended to progressively replace both cash and traditional payment cards. According to the Trump administration, the mere existence of Pix would constitute a form of unfair competition against major U.S. credit and debit card companies, potentially challenging the technological and financial dominance of large American technology corporations in the Latin American market and elsewhere.

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