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Overview of the Strategic Partnerships and Regional Leadership: The cases of Brazil and Russia

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Acknowledgement

The purpose of this paper is to present preliminary results of the research that is being developed within the framework of a PhD thesis on Political Science and International Relations. As only a few months have passed since its beginning, this paper is strongly based on literature review. The main result expected with it is to have feedback in this early stage in order to ameliorate its hypotheses and strengthen some arguments.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) has traditionally been an active actor in promoting regional integration across the world. In the 1970s François Duchene talked about a “Civilian Power Europe” which served as basis for other definitions such as Normative Power Europe (Manners, 2002) or Model Power Europe (Ferreira-Pereira, 2012). Over the last decades the Union has promoted its integration model to other organizations across the world in order to reduce the possibilities of war in those regions and create economic ties with their markets. One of the regions where this strategy has been applied was in South America, especially within the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) (Onuki, 2006; Vasconcelos, 2007). The countries that once integrated the Warsaw Pact, including ex-USSR countries in Europe, were offered with different approaches: association with Western structures such as NATO or the EU, eventually further fully integrating them – Russia excluded.

However, with the failure to sign an Association Agreement between the EU and Mercosur, mainly due to agricultural issues, Brussels found in the *framework* of the Strategic Partnership a way of developing closer relations with Brasilia. In 2007, at the first EU-Brazil Summit, the two capitals signed the agreement in Lisbon, initiating a series of conversations and annual meetings that eventually brought them into a deeper relationship (Silva, 2011; Roy, 2012). Concerning Russia, a Common Strategy of the EU on Russia was adopted in 1999 and later enforced with the establishment of the four Common Spaces in 2004¹. Even though there is not a written document establishing a Strategic Partnership with Russia, the country has been considered has a strategic partner alongside with Brazil and eight others² (Giusti and Penkova, 2012).

Strategic Partnerships are part of a new approach of EU’s Foreign Policy and were formally presented the 16th September 2010 by the Council and Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security. The main goal is to establish and/or reinforce the relationship with countries considered as crucial for the Union’s foreign policy (Sautenet, 2012). However, it is not clear if this policy reinforces or reduces the impact of previous policies that promoted regional integration.

Previous studies paid attention to different dimensions concerning this subject. Authors like Telò (2009) have analysed EU’s global *actorness* and its role in processes of regional integration. They argued that Brussels has been successful in reproducing its model across the world and might be the cause for the creation and growing of new associations and common markets in a context of “multiplying effect” provoked by its success as regional organization in a globalized world. Söderbaum and Langenhove (2006) also refer its direct action in this process and in its relationship with other regional structures, consequently promoting inter-regionalism.

A second dimension is in line with the arguments given by Valladão (2008), Vasconcelos (2007), Trenin (2008) or Husar *et al* (2010) and constitutes a more recent field of the literature that focus on bilateral agreements signed by the EU such as Strategic Partnerships. Some like Renard and Biscop (2012) notice that all BRICS³ countries are both emerging powers and strategic partners, meaning that the EU is looking to adapt to a less westernized world and recognizing that its future must be global.

¹ Economy; Freedom, Security and Justice; External Security; Research, Education, Culture (Giusti and Penkova, 2012: 120).

² Japan, the USA, China, Mexico, South Africa, India, South Korea and Canada.

³ Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

There is also a field exploring the role of Russia and Brazil concerning regional integration on their respective regions (Busygina, 2008; Valladão, 2008; Saraiva, 2007; Vieira, 2012). As regional powers, Russia and Brazil aspire to be integrated in “clubs of power” like the G8. Lessa (2010) and Saraiva (2007) also point out that Brazil – and generally speaking South America – is enrolled in multiple projects which demonstrates the country’s preference for multilateral forums. On the contrary, Rowe and Torjesen (2008) explore Russian preference for bilateral relations. Despite the differences, in both cases the important heterogeneity in economic development or different political options of the States composing the region are problems with which the leaders have to deal with (Onuki, 2011; Lima, 2006).

Flemes (2010) and Nolte (2010) have analysed some emerging powers in their regional contexts. Basing on their arguments one may say that both Brazil and Russia use their regions as trampolines to reach (or recover in the Russian case) an international prominence. Concerning regional integration in Eurasia⁴, it is important to take into consideration the close presence of the European Union and Russian competition to attract the so called “States-in-between”⁵ into its integration projects (Vieira and Mourato Pinto, 2013).

Hence, there seems to be a lack of literature crossing studies about Brazilian and Russian regional power with external influences in their regions, namely EU’s Strategic Partnerships and the Union’s global *actorness*. This study intends to contribute to the overall comprehension of this dynamic, clarifying concepts through a comparison of the relationship between these two emerging actors and EU’s Strategic Partnerships.

A first regard may find this comparison odd since Brazil and Russia relate differently with the EU. First of all, while the latter has common borders with the Union the former is not even situated in the same continent. This feature has created an ambiguous and paradoxical relationship between Brussels and Moscow, since competition is balanced with a symbiotic relation (energy is an obvious and widely studied example). That is far from being the case with Brazil, despite the growing importance of European investments in the country.

One may also point out that Brazil may be considered as being a role state, looking forward to participate in international organizations and assuming their values as its own, feature that eventually approximates Brasilia and Brussels. With regard to Russia, some of its characteristics are closer to those of an Ego State, worrying particularly with its national identity, feasibly acting outside international norms and thus distancing itself from the EU (Shih, 2012).

Yet, since our goal is to assess the impact of the Strategic Partnerships on regional powers in their regions, we should detach ourselves from their differences in order to find and focus on their similarities. First of all, among all ten strategic partners Russia and Brazil are the only that are effectively engaged in building and leading regional organizations. One could talk about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for the United States. However, since the other two members are also EU’s strategic partners the hypotheses would have to be different and the only comparison possible would be among themselves. South Africa is enrolled in the South African Development Community (SADC), being the most important member concerning economic criteria. However, this organization is not consolidated as Mercosur (or even UNASUR) and the region has never *worked* together as in Eurasia.

⁴⁴ The notion of Eurasia used in this paper corresponds mainly to territory that once composed USSR (D’Encausse, 1995).

⁵ This definition normally refers to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Brazilian and Russian-led projects are the only that are effectively producing important results, conducting their regions into deeper integration, especially from a trade/economy point of view. Knowing that the Association Agreement with Mercosur has failed and that direct European investments in the States-in-between are not well-viewed from Moscow, Strategic Partnerships with Brazil and Russia may allow the EU to gain indirect access to their markets. Also, these two countries integrate important forums that question current world order like the BRICS, trying eventually to distance themselves especially from the United States, and diversifying their partners in order to strengthen their foreign policy. As said before, all BRICS countries are strategic partners, but due to the characteristics we mentioned before Brasilia and Moscow allow a clear and straighter comparison.

Thus, for this study, even though some of these arguments may be questioned, at a primary stage we find that the comparison between the Strategic Partnerships with Russia and Brazil, with a special regard on their impact on the regional integration processes they lead, may provide a pertinent perspective on what this new paradigm of European Foreign Policy might mean.

This paper does not intend to make a balance of both Strategic Partnerships in terms of achievements nor entering in the debate about their definition. As the title suggests, it will rather explore the contexts that were behind their origins and how they may relate with the regional integration processes that are taking place in both South America and Eurasia under the leadership of Brazil and Russia respectively. By the end of this research we expect to better understand if the establishment of Strategic Partnerships with the EU has reinforced or damaged Brazilian and Russian regional power and what are the consequences on the regional integration processes they lead. With this paper we are looking forward to group and analyse some of the works and articles related with this field and briefly cross and compare them.

In order to achieve this goal, and at this stage of our study, we considered pertinent to divide this paper in two main parts. The first part will explore both Brazilian and Russian regional contexts. We will particularly analyse how these countries relate with their regions and vice-versa, mainly focusing on the most recent developments – the Mercosur, UNASUR and the Eurasian Economic Union. The second part will explore their relationships with the EU and how it involved into the creation of both Strategic Partnerships.

I. Brazil and Russia as emerging powers: the weight of their regions on their foreign policies

To define what a regional power is not an easy task. There are several definitions according to the focus the author wishes to give. Most analysis have economic conceptualization as basis, eventually confusing terms like emerging *economies* or *markets* with emerging *powers*. Although all emerging powers must have strong economic development in order to be recognized as such, not all emerging economies have the power – mostly in political and military terms – to be considered as emerging powers.

After the crises both Brazil and Russia lived in 1999, their economies grew fast during the next decade gathering around them most of the countries in their regions. This status allowed them to obtain an important political leverage that is now projecting them as regional powers and, therefore, emerging powers. As Swielande (2012: 16) puts it “an emerging power is by definition a power in the making, characterized by its instability and relativity. It is a regional power that can become a global power”. Thus, regions are crucial for these actors to achieve worldwide importance.

a) Russia and the Eurasian Space

An analysis of the relationship between Russia and its region has to take into consideration their common past within the Russian Empire and the USSR. The relationships that once existed, with Moscow in the centre of this vast region, still influence the current rationale behind Eurasian integration.

After 1991 some attempts have been made to reunite the region under the same umbrella being the most important the Community of Independent States (CIS). Shortly after their independences most countries understood that the achievement of political autonomy had not been followed by an economic one nor the creation of political borders had changed the division of labour inside the USSR. It was almost impossible for some of the newly independent republics to have an autonomous production of goods. The CIS attenuated the negative impacts of the dissolution of the USSR by keeping some of the ties that existed between its members mainly through economic, military and even political cooperation. For Moscow the CIS was the best option to maintain a close relationship particularly with Belarus and Ukraine, countries considered as being crucial for the very construction of the Russian identity. Nevertheless, despite the early success of the CIS, the three Baltic States, Moldova and Georgia opt to follow a path outside this Russian-led project (Mourato Pinto, 2012).

The community was important to maintain some peace in the region, creating the conditions to pass from a *Pax Sovietica* into a *Pax Russica*. However, the goal was only partially achieved since in 2011 only 14% of Russia's external trade was made with CIS member States. Albeit its integration model was somehow based on the EU, it failed to implement important reforms and to establish truly common policies. Even though a Free Trade Area was created in 1994, its implementation suffered several problems, never accomplishing its potential goals. Moreover, the Russian economic crisis of 1999 affected the whole region and seriously weakened the CIS (Lapidus, 2001).

Vladimir Putin began its first mandate in the same year and introduced during the next years different perspectives on how the region should work. In 2000 a Eurasian Economic Community was formed with few developments until the creation of a first Customs Union. With the expansion of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) towards East it became even more important for Moscow to create a structure with the capacity to compete with Western organizations. Putin understood that internal economic reforms and growth needed a consolidated region and an integrated market (Tarr, 2012).

In 2010 it was created the most recent organization with this ambition: the Customs Union (CU) and its associated Economic Space, projected to become the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) by 2015. So far only Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have integrated this structure, although countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have already manifested their interest in becoming future members. The CU has already shown some results that distinguish it from previous arrangements: the Russian tariff is now used as the common tariff since July 2010, a Eurasian Commission and Integration Council were created and since the 1st January 2012 the Single Economic Space works in order to establish a common market for goods, services, capital and labour (Vieira and Mourato Pinto, 2013).

Competition with the EU in the States-in-between has played an important role in the construction of this new project. The will to create a Eurasian Union was firstly mentioned by Vladimir Putin in the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* in 2011 (Putin, 2011) and makes part of a broader pragmatic approach that Moscow is undertaking concerning Eurasia since the beginning of the XXI century. The ideological focus lost some of its importance and gave place to economic-oriented policies, a vision shared by the other states composing the CU. Like the CIS, the model adopted by the EU is an important basis. However, there is a clear rejection of political integration, giving the option to each state to make their own internal choices (Tarr, 2012).

This feature is pointed by Moscow as one of the main advantages the CU has to offer when compared with the EU. While association with the EU is accompanied with a mandatory adoption of part of the *acquis communautaire*, fully integration within the CU is argued to be automatic and without the imposition of non-negotiated rules. Since these countries are all part of the Eastern Partnership (EaP)⁶ one may affirm that “as Moscow demonstrates determination to attract further participants to its new integration project, the states-in-between seem to be presented with the ‘East-or-West’ dilemma, which is increasingly framed in either/or terms” (Vieira and Mourato Pinto, 2013).

Therefore, Moscow’s current relationship with its region has changed over the last decade, focusing less on past relations and more on concrete proposals, looking forward to attract its neighbours into its sphere through a rhetoric presented in economic terms. More than an ideology, the states-in-between, as part of Russia’s concept of Eurasia, have to choose between to models of economic integration.

b) Brazil and South America

Even though some cooperation projects were presented in the past, it was the advent of democracy in Brazil and Argentina that truly created the conditions for regional integration.

⁶ The EaP is a specialized approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which are all of the “States-in-between”.

Since 1985 both Brazilian and Argentinian presidents understood that their countries would profit more working together than competing as it was mainly the case until then. A few months later presidents José Sarney of Brazil and Raúl Alfonsín of Argentina signed the Declaration of Iguazu, planting the seed that would give origin to the Treaty of Assunção and the creation of the Mercosur in 1991. The founding members were Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, which were joined by Venezuela in 2012.

During the mandates of Cardoso (1995-2002) Brazil fully adopted a market-based economy, opening its borders and privatizing some companies, leaving most protectionist policies behind. This allowed Direct Foreign Investment to grow and markets to expand, pushing its neighbours in the same direction. Yet, and as it happened with Russia, Brasilia quickly understood that regional economic integration would benefit this growing and Argentina had to be part of it (Cervo, 2006).

In the context of enhanced international cooperation that followed the end of the Cold War during the 1990s, the creation of Mercosur was the natural step that putted the region in the world map of economic transactions. It was an important tool that allowed its members to profit from globalization within a larger organization that could refrain some of its negative aspects. Brazil was perhaps the member that profited the most, but also due to successful internal reforms like the Plano Real which introduced major economic readjustments (Onuki, 2006). The new currency and new regional organizations, alongside with the Cardoso's capacity to gather new partners across the most important capitals, served as the first trampolines that created in Brazil the conditions to be considered today as an emerging country (Spektor, 2010).

However, even if the first years may be considered as a success, a strong devaluation of Real threw Brazil into a crisis that later took Argentina (2001) and eventually Mercosur with it (Spektor, 2010). This situation generated suspicions among the main investors, mainly EU member-States, hurting the international image of the Brazilian-led project. The relationship between Brasilia and Buenos Aires – which are an important core of South American relations – also found difficulties that had lost relevance during the successful years of Mercosur.

With the arrival of Lula da Silva to the presidency in 2003, Brazilian perceptions about its placement in the region (and in the world) changed. While Cardoso's presidency had been mainly influenced by the end of the Cold War and the intensification of international cooperation, Lula's mandates correspond to a period in international relations strongly marked by the 9/11, the fight against terrorism and the rise of forums such as the IBSA⁷, BRICS or even the BASIC⁸.

Lula followed a different line with regard to Cardoso, applying a developmental programme aimed at reducing Brazilian external dependence (with energetic autonomy, for example), promoting financial growth and enforcing cooperation with its neighbours in South America. His governments also tried to renegotiate the international order, bringing new debates from the South into organizations built by the North – mainly the United Nations. Brazil's main goal is to defend Southern rights and encourage South-South cooperation (Ghigiu, 2013).

After building an ideological consensus around the idea of an autonomous South America, accompanied with the economic success around Mercosur, Brasilia successfully incepted in its neighbours the need for further integration within a more complex organization (Burges, 2008).

⁷ India, Brazil and South Africa.

⁸ Brazil, South Africa, India and China.

This is the context behind the creation of the Union of Southern Nations (UNASUR) in 2008. With a stronger political scope than previous organizations, UNASUR also searched for some know-how on the European experience. However, and having a logic similar to the one found in the Eurasian space, supranational integration is rejected, maintaining a strong intergovernmental functioning. Along with a flexible approach towards democracy and the decision to let the economic sphere to be regulated by already existing organizations⁹, this feature created the conditions for the membership of the totality (12) of South American countries: something never seen before.

UNASUR strengthened itself by creating new institutions and branches that cover several areas, ranging from infra-structures or health to the military (through the creation of a Security and Defence Council). As Pothuraju (2012) explains “over the years, UNASUR has had some significant achievements to its credit: limiting defence expenditure, reducing crime, promoting democratic institutions, integrating energy and financial systems, handling constitutional crises in Ecuador and Paraguay, and settling dispute between Venezuela and Colombia”. However, after only five years of existence and despite its early success, it is still premature to affirm that it will resist to future challenges in the continent.

Dilma Rouseff, the Brazilian president since 2011, follows a similar line concerning her predecessor. Brasilia’s foreign policy is now more pragmatic and less ideological-orientated, giving less centrality to presidential diplomacy. The relationship with Northern countries is more stable, namely with the United States whilst the regional context has not lost importance (Saraiva, 2011).

One of the main concerns that Cardoso, Lula and Dilma always had regarding South America is its democratic stability. Since Brazil is viewed from outside as the regional power (and thus leader) it cannot risk to have instability in its own neighbourhood¹⁰. The suspension of Paraguay from Mercosur membership after the *coup d’état* against president Lugo in 2012 is a practical example of this posture. Brazil is proud to be considered a traditional defender of human rights and for having participated in more than half of UN’s peacekeeping missions, using these as arguments to affirm itself as the leader of the South. Hence, Brazilian international image partially depends on its neighbours’ democratic stability. Following this logic, since Lula’s presidency Brazil has adopted an attitude of “non-indifference” instead of “non-intervention” towards South America (Vasconcelos, 2007; Mathias et al., 2008).

⁹ Such as the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), the Bolivian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) or the Mercosur.

¹⁰ We consider as Brazilian neighbourhood all the South American countries.

II. The European Union and emerging powers: the cases of Brazil and Russia

Having these developments as background we will now turn our attention to the relationship between Brazil and Russia with the EU. To attain our goal we will limit our analysis to the past two decades since until the beginning of the 1990s both countries had a different behaviour regarding their regions and their relationship with the then European Communities was within the *framework* of the Cold War.

As we stressed in the introduction, it is important to keep in mind geopolitical aspects and the fact that while South America has been entirely colonized by European powers (being the French Guyana a French *Département* today), the Eurasian region as we defined here was mostly part of the Russian Empire. Moreover, as we will see, current relations between the EU and Russia are mostly marked by the power of attraction they are able to exert on the States-in-between, energetic issues and also sporadic military tensions around the expansion of NATO to which the EU is roughly considered to be connected by Moscow. Nevertheless, as we explained before, these two countries gather characteristics that allow us to better test and compare the implementation of the Strategic Partnerships in a broader regional context.

In these previous remarks it is also pertinent to notice that the application of EU's foreign policies sometimes collides with those implemented by some of its member-States. This may be explained by the fact that the EU is not a federation and therefore it has not developed a true political federal culture which is defined by Burgess (2012: 3) as being "a tradition of specific values, attitudes, beliefs, and interests that, though often only dimly perceived, are closely intertwined with established federal principles". Even though the federal debate is not at the core of our study, we find important to have it in mind in order to better understand shifts in the approach made by the EU to both actors.

a) The EU and Russia

As Giusti and Penkova (2012: 118) argue, "the entire history of relations between Russia and Europe has been marked (...) by the need to cooperate, periodically replaced by competition and mistrust. Similar ups and downs have also characterized the institutional ties between the Russian Federation and the EU". Since both these two actors are regional powers with global aspirations, the fact they have to share part of the region they consider to be crucial to achieve their international goals strongly condition their relationship.

The signature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, even though it only came into force in 1997, opened the path to a closer dialog. The main objective was not to grant Russia a full membership, but rather promote deep cooperation in terms of Common Foreign and Security policy and Justice and Home Affairs. As we mentioned before, cooperation was further reinforced in 2003, at a Summit held in Saint Petersburg, with the creation of the four "common spaces" and the respective roadmaps to achieve common goals.

However, each side has its own problems concerning deeper cooperation. As we said, EU member States have different perspectives on how to relate with Russia. Whilst some view the Russian market and investments as an important opportunity for the Union, others, mainly due to the weight of the past, find difficulties in engaging new conversations. This duality may be pointed out as one of the main explanations for the inexistence of a document establishing a Strategic Partnership. In 2008 Poland and Lithuania used their veto, delaying the establishment

of an EU-Russia broader agreement (Giusti and Penkova, 2012). In its turn, Russia is fighting to recover some of its lost influence in the zone defined by Moscow as its 'Near Abroad', especially in the States-in-between. Therefore, the creation of the ENP in 2004, upgraded into the EaP in 2008, is viewed as the expansion of Western values and presence on a sensitive region for Russian national and international image. Russia pressures its neighbours to reject offers presented by the EU like the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), causing some discomfort not only in Brussels but also in the directly affected capitals.

Due to this *tension*, as long with other factors such as energy and security, further integration between the two regional powers in Europe has been compromised. They now seem to be more at a level of competition in terms of 'power-of-attraction' of the states-in-between into their spheres. Thus, the relationship in the framework of a Strategic Partnership seems to be not working due to regional tensions. Both Russia and the EU cannot separate their bilateral relations from the fact they share common borders in a competing environment (Vieira and Mourato Pinto, 2013).

Nevertheless, other projects are taking place. That is the case of the Partnership for Modernization (PfM) which was launched in 2010 after the Rostov-on-Don summit between Brussels and Moscow. "The PfM has been presented as a common modernization agenda to advance the EU and Russian economies and to bring their citizens closer, while contributing to global recovery and stronger international economic advance" (Giusti and Penkova, 2012: 123). More specifically, the PfM looks forward to enforce the four common spaces, expanding the possibilities of cooperation in areas like bilateral trade or environmental issues.

Despite the rhetoric, important tensions continue to arise, delaying further developments on this Strategic Partnership. The current identity crisis within the EU widely aggravated by the economic, political and social downturn, are viewed from Moscow – and also Brazil – as a proof that the EU has its limits, confirming that other conceptions must be taken into consideration. Hence, the discredit of the European model is having important impacts on its world position, affecting the relationship with Russia – the European emerging country. For now, the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership does not seem to be creating further cooperation outside other arrangements.

b) The EU and Brazil

The relationship between the EU and Brazil is recent when compared with other strategic partners. Although some agreements had been signed before¹¹, particularly in the Latin American context, it was only in 1986 – with the EU membership of Portugal and Spain – that Brazil started to be recognized as an important partner to the EEC/EU (Vasconcelos, 2007; Roy, 2012; Ghigiu, 2013). Part of this recognition started from Portugal which profited from its presidencies of the Council to successfully pressure for a closer relationship between Brussels and Brasilia. During the presidency of 1992 the Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the European Economic Community and Federative Republic of Brazil was signed, boosting exchanges in fields like technology, energy and transportation (Silva, 2011).

However, during the 1990s most interactions occurred at the multilateral level and particularly via Mercosur. The relationship between both organizations reached its highest with the

¹¹ The most important were a Commercial Agreement (1973) and a Cooperation Agreement (1980).

signature of an Inter-regional Framework Cooperation agreement in 1999. This document should have been the base for an association agreement that was never finished due to disagreements concerning agriculture. The EU has special concerns with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the protection of its members' markets in this field. Being Agriculture one of the strongest areas within Mercosur, the negotiations could not develop without solving this issue (Pozo, 2013). Nevertheless, during the last decade of the XX century, trade from the EU to Mercosur grew 250% (Saraiva, 2006).

The crisis Mercosur experienced after 1999 and the failure to finish the Association Agreement slowed the rhythm of the cooperation. On the one hand, Brussels started to question Mercosur's capacity to survive in a globalized world with strong competition. The entrance of Venezuela and the *Coup d'état* in Paraguay, both in 2012, also contributed as negative factors (Pozo, 2013). On the other hand, South American countries – and particularly Brazil – are blaming the EU for of protectionism concerning agriculture (Roy, 2012). Despite the ten negotiation rounds between 1999 and 2003 there is still no date for the signing of this agreement¹².

With little perspective of signing an agreement with Mercosur, the EU turned its attention particularly to Brazil, recognizing its role as leader of an emerging region with relevant opportunities for European investment. The best solution came with the signing of the Strategic Partnership in the first EU-Brazil Summit which was held in Lisbon in 2007. Since then annual meetings have created the conditions for new arrangements in fields like research in technology, energy and even security. At the second summit, in 2008, a Joint Action Plan has been signed, providing the partnership with relevant roadmaps. The EU has become one of Brazil's most important partners totalizing 22% of its trade. Also, Brazil is the BRICS that receives the most foreign direct investment from the EU which is added to a funding of 61 million euro mostly applied on the enhancement of bilateral relations (Ghigiu, 2013).

The Strategic Partnership with Brazil also includes the recognition of Mercosur as an important vehicle to promote regional development and economic integration in South America. This is a strong sign that EU-Mercosur cooperation is not finished and that both Brussels and Brasilia wish to engage in further cooperation at the multilateral level. The solution might pass by the reduction of agricultural weight in negotiations, at least in a first phase. The commercial advantages in other fields have an enormous potential and should not be delayed because of only one chapter. Moreover, since both Brazil and the EU proudly affirm themselves as defenders of an effective multilateral order, the failure of the association agreement gives the opposite message they wish to pass. Also, this new arrangement would enforce both Brazilian and EU's capacity of negotiation with third parties and could solve the current stagnation inside Mercosur (Onuki, 2011).

¹² Negotiations are blocked since 2004, although they should restart by the end of 2013.

Conclusion

Accordingly to Ghigiu (2013: 49) “Strategic Partnerships are seen as a way of maximizing EU’s room for manoeuvre on a global scale. A partnership established with another major international player boosts EU’s self-esteem and generates greater international consideration”. In practice the main goal is to establish common agendas and raise both actors’ capacity to act together in international forums. With the growth of the international importance of emerging countries like Brazil and Russia, Strategic Partnerships appear as a partial solution to articulate the redistribution of power that might occur in the next decades.

However, and as we briefly explored, they seem to have an unexpected relation with regional integration processes. With the stagnation of Mercosur and the Russian promotion of an alternative and competitive integration project in Eurasia, the EU had to modify its approach in these regions. The strategy is now passing by giving less centrality to multilateral arrangements and relate bilaterally with regional leaders.

In South America, while still waiting for further results within the framework of UNASUR, the Strategic Partnership with Brazil allows the maintenance of a continuous dialog with the regional power. Concerning Russia, even though there is not an official document instituting the Strategic Partnership, the Common Spaces and the PFM, along with the recognition of Russia as a strategic partner, open the possibility of further cooperation. Hence, Strategic Partnerships do not create a contradiction with the philosophy behind effective multilateralism. They complement its logic and bring important actors into direct dialog with the Union, creating special conditions for further cooperation.

In this stage of our research it is still not clear which might be the real impacts of Strategic Partnerships on processes of regional integration in South America and Russia and on EU’s global actorness. Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that for both Brazil and Russia they have some positive impacts at the regional and global level. Firstly, Strategic Partnerships are a formal recognition that as emerging powers Brazil and Russia have a central role in international relations. Secondly, these agreements created a regular and direct contact, facilitating further developments in the relationships between Brasilia and Moscow with Brussels. Thirdly, the deepening of regional integration processes in South America and Eurasia and has strengthened Brazilian and Russian roles as regional leaders. Finally, one may also point out that despite some of the difficulties found in the past few years, having an institutionalized relationship with the EU allows them to balance their relationship with the United States. This is central goal for two actors that actively defend the renegotiation of the international order (Pozo, 2013).

It is still to see and research other positive but also negative consequences of Strategic Partnerships on regional leaders.

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