The rise of the Mercosur Parliament: at what point does a legislature become institutionalized?*

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In December 2005, the presidents of the four Mercosur member states signed the Constitutive Protocol of the Mercosur Parliament (MP). The new assembly was officially installed in December 2006 and began its work sessions in May 2007. It replaced the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) and has direct elections planned for 2010. Although the Parliament functions and competences did not change substantially in comparison with the former Committee, the Protocol affirms the necessity of reinforcing and deepening the integration process. According to the document, it is essential to have an efficient and balanced institutional structure, which would permit the production of effective norms in an atmosphere of security and stability. In the same direction, some actors tend to believe that the creation of a Parliament could conduct more vigorously the discussions to the political and social spheres, which would allow Mercosur to transcend the commercial aspects and strengthen the integration framework.

In order to infer the potential role of the Parliament in reinforcing the institutional structure of Mercosur, this paper aims to analyze its first year of activities. Even if the relations among institutionalization, parliamentary powers and integration strength are not simple and deserve special analysis, the institutionalization level reached by the assembly until now can already indicate to what extent the proclaimed objectives of the creation of the Parliament are valid. This assumption is grounded on the idea that the more institutionalized the legislature is, the more it will influence the political system. The Mercosur Parliament would only be able to increase the integration institutional framework if it displays certain valued rules, procedures and patterns of behavior that conform political institutions in general. If those elements are absent, or if they remain the same of the JPC, the rise of this new assembly may not correspond to the public purposes of the Protocol. The central hypothesis is that the MP shows a minimum degree of institutionalization, which would not be enough to

stimulate substantial institutional changes in Mercosur if the European example is considered.

This hypothetical frame is based on the institutional approach to political science (Rhodes, 1995), particularly on the new institutionalism studies (March and Olsen, 1984, 1989; Hall and Taylor, 1997; Orren and Skowronek, 1994). Since the end of the 1970’s, research on institutions has been increasing among political scientists, after a period dominated by a noninstitutional conception of political life. This rethinking movement, which was afterwards described as “new institutionalism”, mixes old institutionalism elements with the noninstitutional style. It emphasizes the role of institutions in providing order and influencing changes in politics, without denying the importance of the social context and the performance of individual actors (March and Olsen, 1989 : 17). Institutions could be considered as variables that structure future political choices, acting in a normative way and conducting decisions and interpretations. In accordance, the MP should substantially affect political preferences in Mercosur and trigger new institutional reforms.

This conception corresponds to the historical institutionalism (Skocpol, 1984; 1995), which assumes that institutions shape political actors objectives and power relations. However, it does not mean that institutions are the unique causes of outcomes, but one more factor among the universe of political forces (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992 : 3). The institutional development is mainly understood by the analysis of the trajectories, critical situations and unexpected consequences (Hall and Taylor, 1997 : 472). An institutional result that could be produced in a certain social and historical context may not happen in different circumstances, so that small events can cause large and unforeseen effects. To this notion of “path dependence”, Paul Pierson (2000) adds the idea of “increasing returns”: costs to modify a decision accrue with time\(^1\). Once an organization decides to follow a specific route, the charges of rethinking this option are high and increase as the time passes. There will be moments for new choices, but the development of some institutional arrangements shall complicate the renouncement of the initial option. This could be the case of Mercosur with the creation of the Parliament.

The present article uses Peter Hall’s relational concept of institutions: they consist in formal rules, compliance procedures and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy (1986 : 19). The idea of institutionalization includes, thus, the process of creation and solidification of these structuring rules, procedures and practices. But at what point does a political institution,

\(^{1}\) “For some theorists, increasing returns are the source of path dependence; for others, they typify only one form of path dependence” (Pierson, 2000 : 251).
such as a parliament, become institutionalized? The first part of the article intends to clarify the institutionalization criteria with a literature review. Later on, the paper will discuss the institutionalization degree of the Mercosur Parliament comparing this assembly with the European Parliament (EP). Therefore, the second part is divided into four segments, corresponding to the selected characteristics for institutionalization analysis in both legislatures: autonomy, complexity, universalization and socialization.

This paper is based on the public documents produced by the Mercosur Parliament during the first year of its activities (December 2006 – February 2008). They consist of recorded proceedings of the monthly plenary sessions (minutes, verbatim reports, adopted decisions), as well as registers of the Brazilian representation’s meetings. Secondary sources were used to analyze the European Parliament, due to the relative large number of studies on the topic. Although documents and bibliographic sources appear to be vital to the kind of study proposed, they reveal important limits mainly to the sociological exam of the socialization process. That is why this study is to be completed with field research remarks, which will derive from observations of the MP meetings and interviews with deputies and other influential actors.

The comparative approach will consider the institutionalization events of both assemblies to provide a balance of the current institutional design of the Mercosur Parliament, although the earliest actions and movements of the Common Assembly of European Coal and Steel Community (1952) and the European Economic Community Assembly (1958) have a special relevance. As the Mercosur parliamentary experience is starting, the comparison cannot neglect the origins of the EP. But it has to consider, at the same time, the gradual achievements and the institutional changes of the assembly until the current phase, in order not to construct a static reflection that does not take into account the dynamics of the integration processes.

The comparison between these South American and European experiences appears to be a useful tool to interpret the parliamentary institutionalization process in both regions (Seiler, 2004 : 107), even if here the former is emphasized. There are still limited essays in regards to creation of integration parliaments, and most of them are inspired by the European “model”. The EP becomes, thus, an inevitable benchmark in this field. In addition, Mercosur seems to encompass a major number of institutional characteristics similar to the European system. Indeed, the bloc members would fit Haas’ conditions concerning the formation of political communities (1958 : XV): a) industrialized economies enmeshed in international trade; b) societies in which masses are mobilized politically and organized in
interest groups and political parties; c) societies led by identifiable elites and d) democratic and constitutional governments. Nevertheless, if these general properties show some symmetry, the initial goals and the political, social and economic contexts in which both organizations are immersed are far from being alike. Mercosur is probably placed somewhere in between the European Union (EU) and its South American and African counterparts, like the Andean Community, the Central America Common Market and the African Union. For those reasons, larger comparative studies about the parliamentary institutionalization levels including the Andean, Central American and Pan African Parliaments, for instance, should be eventually conducted\(^2\). It is also useful to stress that even if the comparative methodology can be used to study similar phenomena produced in different realities or different phenomena produced in similar realities (Vigour, 2005: 160-161), in none of the cases to compare is equal to assimilate. A comparative study that does not look for both resemblances and disparities will either empty the method (by excess of assimilation) or make useless the comparison (by excess of differentiation) (Sartori, 1997: 209).

1. Institutionalization: in search of a concept

Jacques Chevallier affirms that institutions are processes of society organization rather than stable social forms. This dialectic interpretation considers institutions in a dynamic way: they are not immutable, rigid and coherent, but a series of operations in permanent transformation. They derive from a persistent tension between instituted forms (l’institué) and instituting forces (l’instituant), where the latter is always destabilizing and reconstructing the former (1981: 8; 1996: 25). The institutionalization process reflects precisely a temporary stability which surpasses this contradiction. Therefore, institutions are the result from an evolutionary path distinguished by three essential movements: specification, differentiation and unification (1981: 14-17). First, institutions tend to isolate a geographical or symbolic space to delineate their own identity and areas of intervention (specification). Second, institutions arise in a world full of social divisions, but also experience in their interior contradictions and disagreements emblematic of the struggle for power, mainly between agents and clients or between directors and employees (differentiation). Nevertheless, institutions conceive themselves as a totality, a homogenous group: this representation is essential to maintain their cohesion and ensure their conservation.

\(^2\) For comparative studies about parliaments’ roles and political systems in these integration processes see, for example, Ajenjo Fresno (2007); Malamud and Souza (2005); Vazquez (2005); Drummond (2005); and Ventura (2003).
These phases are not necessarily successive, and can interchange regularly, with each institution developing its own pattern for the process. More recently, Chevallier presents different elements of explanation that complement this classification with a political perception (1996: 18-24). The specification corresponds to the social significance of the institution: the institutionalization process exists when the social imaginary recognizes the organization, it means, when this group of signals and symbols becomes socially stable. The social relations within the institution coincide with the differentiation category: institutionalization reflects the definition of roles, positions and functions in which the actors are divided. The unification stage is compatible with the forms of collective action of an institution, meaning that the institutionalization process implies a gradual transformation of identity: the institution becomes an impersonal, objective and autonomous entity (objectivization) and the members internalize this status, creating an organizational culture (internalization).

Institutionalization of political organizations and procedures is an essential part of political development (Huntington 1965: 393), which comprises the processes of rationalization, integration, democratization and social mobilization. The presence of institutions defines the authority of the government (in the sense of political capacity) and cannot be dissociated from its economic links. Based on those assertions, Samuel Huntington brings the institutionalization concept more vigorously to the political sphere and proposes four criteria to measure the value and the stability of a political system (Ibid: 393-405; Id 1968: 13-24). By adaptability Huntington understands the faculty of institutions to change and to adjust their procedures and functions to environmental and political context transformations. Complexity is another characteristic of the high institutionalized organizations, which means multiplication and specification of organizational subunits, hierarchically and functionally, in order to depend less on isolated individuals. The autonomy of the institution is measured by the extent to which its interests, values and procedures exist independently of other political organizations and social groupings. A forth benchmark of institutionalization is the organization coherence, denoting a minimum substantial consensus about the functional boundaries and dispute solving within the organization.

Johan Olsen synthesizes the institutionalization segment of his researches with James March in three dimensions: a) structuration and routinization, b) standardization, homogenization and authorization of codes of meaning, ways of reasoning and accounts and c) binding resources to values and worldviews (2001: 327). To be considered as political actors, institutions would also need coherence (capacity to make decisions) and autonomy
The literature has also delineated the institutionalization criteria for parliaments. A revival of the legislative studies in Europe and Unites States can be seen from the end of the 1960s. After a long period analyzing the parliaments decline and the role of parties and Executive power in the decision-making process, some scholars began to investigate parliamentary transformations and institutional adjustment in order to fit in contemporary democracies. The large number of legislatures in the world and their historical persistence justifies some attention, mainly in a cross-national basis (Norton, 1998: xii).

Institutionalization studies would be legitimate, according to Nelson Polsby, because creating institutions is a necessary step to the viability of a political system and to its success in performing tasks in behalf of the population (1968: 144). Moreover, democracy and liberty depend on institutionalized representative forums containing political cleavages. Consequently, the author proposes three major characteristics to define an institutionalized organization: a) it is differentiated from its environment and its members are easily identifiable; b) it shows a complex organization of roles and activities, with functional specification and patterns of recruitment c) and the organization tends to use universalistic and automatic means to conduct its internal procedures, rather than particularistic and discretionary logics (Ibid: 145).

Jean Blondel assumes that if legislatures are considered weak and resilient even if they are a symbol of liberal democracy, it is because the adaptation of the modern representative ideals to reality was not entirely possible (1973: 3). He proposes then a reevaluation of the legislature’s role in the democratic process in conformity to contemporary practices. The success in achieving these renewed functions would depend on constitutional prerogatives and on internal and external constraints. The internal ones emanate from the members or the structure of the assembly, while the external constraints derive from influence or coercion of outside elements (Ibid: 45).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Internal constraints</th>
<th>Time: legislatures need more time than the executive to examine problems, and that increases as the population and the number of legislators enlarge.</th>
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<td>Political and technical competence in the various fields of the government.</td>
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<td>Assembly infrastructure: procedures and technical support to help legislators.</td>
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<td>External constraints</td>
<td>Executive strength, derived from the legitimacy or the coercion of the regime.</td>
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In order to measure the influence of legislators, Blondel divides parliaments according to their role in the policy-making (Ibid: 136-140): parliaments may interfere in
detailed, intermediate or broad policies.

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<tr>
<th>Type of legislature</th>
<th>Influence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Legislature whose ostensible activities are very small and whose effectiveness remain at the level of detailed matters.</td>
<td>Questions related to local government or public corporations, which already receive a treatment in a different sphere of government or could be treated by a Judiciary system.</td>
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<td>Legislature where some bills and general policies are discussed with reasonably effectiveness, but they do not concern the most important aspects of the life of the country.</td>
<td>Problems of intermediate importance, vaguely known and hardly discussed by the citizen because of their technical or abstract characteristics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislature which discusses all matters of government but is not able to influence broader questions.</td>
<td>Detailed, intermediate and broad subjects, such as foreign affairs or important social and economic questions.</td>
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Also comparing parliament’s characteristics and functions from existent empiric bases, Michael Mezey proposes a classification that corresponds to the masses’ or elite’s expectations towards the assembly (1979: 20). The policy-making model suggests that the legislative and control functions are essential to a parliament, which is supposed to create law according to people’s wish. In the representation model the parliament is perceived as an intermediate between voters and government: the influences on public policies are achieved by interest articulation and representation, not by direct legislative activities. The political system maintenance model supposes that the legislature essential role is to keep the system functioning, through socialization of elites, conflict resolution and government legitimation. The second element of Mezey’s classification is the policy-making strength, which is defined as the constraint that the legislature is capable of placing on the policy-making activities of the executive. Parliaments have strong, modest or little or no policy-making, depending on their possibility of rejecting or changing a governmental proposition (Ibid: 21-44). These two categories would allow the following typology:

<table>
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<th>Type of legislature</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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| Active parliaments  | - Strong policy-making power   
                       | - Efficient interest representation   
                       | - Political activism that strengthens the political system |
| Vulnerable parliaments | - Strong policy-making power   
                         | - Difficulties in interest representation, due to the concurrence with the Executive Power   
                         | - Little contribution to political system stability |
| Reactive parliaments | - Modest policy-making power   
                        | - Consensus about the representation role of the parliament   
                        | - Popular support that strengthens the political system |
| Marginal parliaments | - Little policy-making power   
                        | - Inefficient interest representation due to limited parliamentary power |
Based on Blondel and Mezey’s previous studies, Philip Norton proposes to consider external and internal elements to measure parliaments’ capacity in influencing governmental actions. The latter correspond to the institutionalization criteria: autonomy (independence of other structures or organizations), universalism (standardization of rules which apply to all actors), adaptability (flexibility in adapting to the constitutional and political context) and organizational complexity (recorded rules and procedures, leadership positions, specialized committees) (1998 : 8).

Gary Copeland and Samuel Patterson, like Norton, try to combine functional and institutionalization analysis in order to explain institutional change, provided that transformation in functions usually occasion transformation in the institution itself. They propose five dimensions for the study of the legislatures’ institutionalization process: autonomy, complexity, formality, uniformity and linkage to environment (1994 : 4-6). Autonomy and complexity have the meanings already mentioned in Norton’s study. Formality implies an impersonal, standardized and predictable performance, which derives from codified and public rules and procedures. Uniformity comprehends the development of typical parliamentary functions, which differentiate legislatures from other political organizations: law-making, recruiting legislative and executive leaders, representation and accountability. Linkage to environment refers to the representative principle. Legitimacy is a vital quality of legislatures, and it derives from bringing to the public space citizens demands.

The institutionalization process, however, cannot be entirely severed of its human aspect: the socialization of actors. In spite of the various meanings that this expression can hold, like other basic concepts of Sociology, here it is understood as the process of interactions and symbol exchanges between the individual and society, and the consequent internalization of certain norms and values of the group3. In a strict political sense, socialization can be defined as the process in which individuals incorporate into their own attitudinal structure and behavior patterns beliefs and representations regarding to power (vertical dimension) and groups (horizontal dimension) (Braud, 1996 : 193). In fact, political

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societies are only viable if the members share a minimum of common convictions about community allegiances and government legitimacy (Ibid : 193). That results from two different processes: assimilation and accommodation (Percheron, 1993 : 32). Through assimilation, individuals try to change the environment to conform it to their wishes; through accommodation, on the contrary, individuals modify personal convictions and practices to better adapt themselves to external circumstances. Therefore, political socialization comprehends not only the inculcation of community principles in its members but also the design of a society political life by individuals moods, manners and values: “what citizens believe and feel about politics both reflect and shape the politics of their nation” (Dawson and Prewitt, 1969 : 4). As a process of identity construction – socialize means to assume the belonging to a group – it should be interpreted in a dialectical perspective, which supposes its interactive, multidirectional, gradual and non-linear characters. Applied to parliaments, these criteria refer to the relation between deputies and the assembly as a whole.

Ernst Haas, looking for the nature of the European integration process, refined the concept of political community: “a condition in which specific groups and individuals show more loyalty to their central political institutions than to any other political authority, in a specific period of time and in a definable geographic space” (1958 : 5). It differs from the “security community”, defined as the absence of violence to achieve political action among the participating groups: the former requires the presence of political institutions capable of translating ideologies into law (Ibid : 7). Applying Haas’ criteria for a community sentiment to the parliamentary socialization, actors should a) endorse supranational rather than national actions, or divide themselves according to this issue; b) organize and define their interests beyond the national level; c) develop a common ideology; d) transform conflicts in negotiations based on a common doctrine (supranationalism); e) show evidence of respecting the regional rule of law, instead of obstructing or ignoring it; f) negotiate with one another in good faith and generally reach agreement, considering the majority rule rather then the right of veto.

In a broad sense, institutionalization corresponds to the way through which social practices created in response to particular problems are solidified in aggregations of specific rules (Cox apud Chevallier, 1996 : 17-18). In this paper, the idea of institutionalization is understood as the process of creation and maintenance of legal procedures and behavioral patterns which establish bases for institutional autonomy, complexity, universalism and socialization. As the institutions in focus are integration parliaments, the criteria are adjusted to this reality (absence of a traditional government and
representation beyond the nation-state). Although the described institutionalization theories were developed to explain national parliaments, the outcomes can be applied to integration parliaments as far as they can be compared to legislatures rather than with international assemblies.

The notion of adaptability, even consisting of an important measure of institutional stability, is not considered due to the short period of existence of the Mercosur Parliament. Uniformity is not part of the analysis as well as it seems to correspond more to the usual parliamentary characteristics than to the institutionalization elements. Blondel and Mezey’s classifications of parliaments influence levels appear only indirectly, also because the activities of the MP so far do not allow a deep examination of its powers, which do not constitute a pure condition of institutionalization, but also one of its results. Besides, some critics appoint the limits of these theories derived from empirical difficulties of measuring elites and masses expectations towards parliaments and from the use of the executive power as parameter (in general, legislatures can not only modify or reject executive’s proposals but also initiate legislation on their own) (Schwarz, 1980 : 557). These theoretical choices are grounded on the three mechanisms of institutional rise defined by Chevallier: construction (formalization/codification), usages (consolidation/incorporation of rules) and redefinition according to changes of conjuncture (1996 : 26). The notions of adaptability, uniformity and political influence belong mostly to consolidation and redefinition processes, whilst this paper aims to approach mainly the construction stage, corresponding to autonomy, complexity, universalization and socialization. This is why parliamentary powers, vital to the influence of legislatures in integration essays, are not specially treated in this paper.

2. Parliamentary institutionalization in Mercosur and European Union

This section proposes a linkage between institutionalization theory and the realities of European and Mercosur Parliaments. As autonomy, complexity, universalization and socialization appear as the most significative criteria do deal with both experiences, this is the division used to organize the analysis, even though some circumstances or events are part of two or more criteria at the same time. The idea of socialization is included for the particular role of actors in parliamentary contexts. Besides, institutionalization and political elite integration show a positive relation (Robins, 1976): the more institutionalized is an organization, the more it influences political actors, and vice-versa. A dialectic mutual relation is thus established: parliamentary institutionalization depends on socialization, but the
latter is also conditioned by the former.

For a better comprehension of the place of the Parliament in the structure of Mercosur, it is pertinent to clarify some of its mechanisms. Mercosur, abbreviation which designs South Common Market, is a regional integration organism created in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Chile, Bolivia, Equador, Peru and Colombia are associated members. Venezuela’s Adhesion Protocol was approved in 2005 and waits for parliamentary ratification in Brazil and Paraguay. The Asunción Treaty (1991), the Ouro Preto Protocol (1994) and the Olivos Protocol (2002) define the objectives and the institutional framework of the bloc. The creation of a common market, the promotion of social and economic development and the maintenance of democracy within Member States are among Mercosur goals. It is formed by the following institutions: Common Market Council (CMC); Common Market Group (CMG), Mercosur Commerce Committee (MCC); Consultive Economic and Social Forum (CESF); Permanent Revision Court (PRC); Secretariat. The CMC is responsible for the main political decisions and it is constituted by the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Economy of the Member States. CMG and MCC are the executive branches, formed by diplomats and officials from ministers and central banks. The latter assists the former in commercial issues policy-making. The CESF represents the economic and social sectors of Mercosur. It is formed by an equal number of representatives of each Member State, usually from labor unions, enterprise syndicates and productive sectors associations. It can present recommendations to CMG. The Permanent Revision Court seats in Asunción. It is integrated by five arbitrators who can be requested any time to review Ad Hoc Courts judgments or to directly decide on conflicts among Member States. The Mercosur Secretariat, placed in Montevideo, is an organ of the CMG’s structure that accomplishes the main administrative and technical responsibilities. The Parliament replaces the Joint Parliamentary Committee, present in the institutional structure since 1991 which represented the national parliaments and displayed consultive functions. Mercosur law does not prime over national rules nor can be applied to individuals or States without internalization in the Member’s juridical systems. In economic terms, it is currently seen as an “imperfect” customs union because of the various products excluded from the common external tariff.

2.1. Autonomy

Institutional autonomy refers to the construction of organizational identity through space delimitation, membership identification and differentiation from other political
and social organizations. Immersed in the political system, autonomous legislatures show also a linkage to their environment. Interdependency regarding to other institutions and citizens demands are part of a free-standing parliament. If the European Parliament nowadays fits all these criteria, the same did not happen in its beginning, which approximates the EP and the MP.

Both institutions have a delimited symbolic space, although the Mercosur Parliament still does not have its own seat. Until now, reunions took place in the Brazilian congress (Brasilia), the Uruguayan congress (Montevideo) and the Montevideo town hall. Recently, sessions started to take place in the Edificio Mercosur (Montevideo), where are settled both executive and parliamentary secretariats. According to the Rules of Proceeding, Montevideo is the official headquarter, but once a semester, during chiefs of state meetings, reunions may take place in a different city depending on the Mercosur temporary presidency. The EP holds three different seats established officially only in 1992 (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg, the last one for some administration services), which does not avoid financial and temporal displacement costs.

The power over the High Authority guaranteed some autonomy to the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). In general, rapports between both institutions were good and a sort of alliance was developed in order to improve the supranational spirit of the ECSC. On the contrary, the absence of control power over the Council of Ministers and the nomination of deputies among national parliamentarians limited Assembly’s activities and made it dependent from national governments and parliaments. Especially after the direct elections of 1979, the European Parliament improved its organic, institutional and political independence (Costa, 2001: 37). The dual mandate continued in some countries, but the autonomy of most of the deputies in regards to national chambers strengthened the identity and the prestige of the EP. The suffrage also allowed increasing EP’s direct relations with the Council and symbolic reaffirmed the roles already reached by the Parliament, which reinforced institutional and political equilibrium within the Community. After the implementation of the co-decision procedure, the Parliament is responsible, as the Council and the Commission, for most legislative decisions. There is thus evidence that the empowerment of the EP brings, at the same time, autonomy to the assembly and interdependence to the European institutional framework. Indeed, the design of the EU’s political system demands actors to listen to their counterparts in the other institutions (Peterson and Shackleton, 2002: 350). The Parliament is not only interlinked with other European organs but also with citizen associations and other interest groups in a highly
institutionalized manner. As the members of the European Parliaments (MEPs) cannot count only on their elected mandate to legitimate their action, they try to compensate a problematic representation invoking the expectations of citizens and being attentive to social organizations and lobby groups demands (Costa, 2006 : 17).

Mercosur Parliament’s members are not easily identifiable as MEPs are today. They belong to national chambers and this is considered their main arena. Besides, the MP is dependent not only from national parliaments but also from national governments, due to the coalitional presidential system typical of the region (Santos, 2003; Malamud, 2003). The 2010 elections may partially change this situation, chiefly because the dual mandate is forbidden by the Constitutive Protocol\(^4\). The same document states in its first article that the MP is an “independent and autonomous” organ. It may be achieved when the Parliament starts to act according to its own values and interests towards the integration and specifies its own intervention champ, that is to say, when the institution becomes relatively well-bounded and also interdependent from the other Mercosur organs. This is not the current general situation: its decisional (CMC) and executive (CMG) branches usually define Mercosur policies without consulting the Consultive Economic and Social Forum or the parliamentarians. An emblematic illustration is the institutional agreement celebrated in 2003 between CMC and JPC but never put into practice. According to the document, the Council should consult the Parliamentary Committee about normative projects which required legislative ratification in member states, and the Committee should make efforts in order the internalization be accomplished, mainly regarding projects resultant from a consensus between both institutions. The Permanent Revision Court is relatively autonomous, in spite of depending only on states to start a process and implement its decisions.

The Constitutive Protocol, as well as the Rules of Procedure, implies that the Temporary Presidency\(^5\) shall come to the Parliament each beginning and end of semester to present either the work program or the developed activities. It corresponds actually to a “competence” of the MP. In the past year, the Paraguayan and Uruguayan ministers of Foreign Affairs were invited by the Parliament to present their governments’ plans for Mercosur (third and fifth plenary sections, respectively). After the exposition of the Paraguayan minister, parliamentarians have started a debate about the possibility of asking

\(^4\) “El ejercicio del cargo de Parlamentario es incompatible con el desempeño de un mandato o cargo legislativo o ejecutivo en los Estados Partes, así como con el desempeño de cargos en los demás órganos del Mercosur” (article 11, 2).

\(^5\) According to the Asunción Treaty, CMC’s presidency will be held by each Member State for a period of six months by alphabetical order.
questions and more detailed explanations to the invited authority. The implicit majoritarian position was that the report should not be discussed with the minister, for an eventual embarrassing situation could make governmental authorities refuse to come personally to the Parliament, meaning that governments are legitimated to contrary a regional rule if MP asks too much. As the Protocol silences about this point, parliamentarians could have interpreted it in order to enlarge their faculties. Nonetheless, they chose to do exactly the opposite, giving up of discussing some relevant themes presented in the account, like the projects for the structural founds, the limits to the free circulation of products, the creation of the Mercosur Social Institute and the new commercial agreements subscribed by Mercosur. After the Uruguayan minister speech, three months later, no comments were made. The passive behavior of deputies reveals the disequilibrium between CMC and MP and reflects the logic of national politics: legislatures are used to expect governments’ proposals and search for the required majority to approve them. Another evidence of this institutional disparity is that there is no register of the Mercosur Secretariat’s budget report, which should be send annually to the Parliament. In addition, Temporary Presidencies did not return in the end of the semester to an evaluation of their program, nor the Parliament asked for it. On one side, this may be a normal situation during a period of institutional structuration; on the other, the fact of having only four reunions per semester will compel parliamentarians to develop a high degree of organization if they want to receive these reports personally.

During the forth plenary session, the Parliament subscribed an institutional agreement with the Consultive Economic and Social Forum. According to the document, both institutions shall meet at least once a semester in order to interchange information and impressions about the integration process. CESF can also offer reports and opinions which shall be considered by the assembly, with or without requirement of the MP. This compromise aims to reinforce and formalize the rapport already existent between CESF and JPC and increase the possibilities of the Forum in intervening in Mercosur policy-making. In spite of the feeble competences of the Parliament, it may serve as a sort of political platform to other institutions. It is clear that not the present, but the potential role of the MP in a near future is being considered. Besides, this event shows a latent wish of Mercosur institutions and economic and social forces to be listened by governments. Another example of MP’s institutional contacts consists in the Unasur Parliament negotiations. Some members of the

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6 This task is also included in the Constitutive Protocol (article 4, 8), among Parliament’s competences.
7 The South American Nations Union (Unasur) is an organism created in April 2007 by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Its main objectives are political and diplomatic coordination in the region; integration of transport, energy and communication means; harmonization
MP participated in meetings of the Andean Parliament to discuss the conformation of a “South American parliamentary space”. On one hand, it denotes MP’s autonomy to directly negotiate with its international counterparts and the intention to take part in the main continental questions. On the other, these efforts represent the historical superposition and lack of concretude of Latin American integration essays.

The limited autonomy of the MP is also related to its social significations. Until now, most of citizens are clearly unaware of the Parliament’s existence. This fact can be explained by three main reasons: the ignorance about Mercosur in general, the incipient publicity initiatives of the MP and the lack of press information about integration, even regional, issues. The construction of a social imaginary about the assembly may begin when the Parliament shows interest about citizens’ demands, putting into practice mechanisms to deliberate on them. The Constitutive Protocol and the Rules of Procedure dispose that the Parliament will organize public audiences with civil society organizations and productive sectors and will receive petitions from any person or organism related to acts and omissions of Mercosur organs. Some committees have been discussing issues of social relevance for the region, like the foot-and-mouth disease and children rights, but their conclusions or propositions seem to be limited. A paradigmatic discussion about the Declaration 4 illustrates the current social links of the MP. In the seventh plenary session, some Uruguayan and Argentinean deputies, after being contacted by a non-governmental organization representing the Armenian community in South America, proposed an urgent motion to publicly disapprove the genocide of the Armenian people committed by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923. Brazilian deputies tried to postpone this decision, stating their lack of information about the subject and desiring to evaluate possible effects on Brazil-Turkey commercial relations. At the end of the session, the Declaration was approved by the required qualified majority.

In brief, the autonomy of the MP is insignificant and less important than the autonomy of the Common Assembly. The absence of headquarters, the dependence of national parliaments and executives and the distance of civil society are characteristics of both institutions, but the European assembly could control the High Authority and hence developed relative horizontal rapports with it. The close direct elections are an advantage of the MP, but the traditional fragility of the legislative branch in South American nations may be extended to the regional level, which would continue to limit the differentiation and the interdependence of the Mercosur Parliament in regards to the other institutions of the bloc.

of rural development policies and stimulation of dialogue among social and economic sectors.
2.2. Complexity

Complexity refers to functional differentiation and specification within the institution, which derives from a relative hierarchical organization, structuration of units and subunits and routinization of procedures. The European Parliament displays a highly complex internal organization, improved through the years. The Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community had six specialized committees, created to follow the High Authority’s activities, although the censure motion was never used. According to the ECSC Treaty, it could fix its own Rules of Procedure. In 1953, political groups were officially recognized and in 1958 the European Parliamentary Assembly created thirteen permanent committees. Nowadays, seven political groups, more than twenty committees and thirty-four delegations structure the work within the Parliament, assisted by a Secretariat. If political groups are compared to the Parliament’s life blood, the committees are its legislative backbone (Westlake, 1994: 191). The Bureau is the regulatory body, consisting of the President, the fourteen Vice-Presidents and the Qaeostors, elected for two and a half years. The organs responsible for the broad political directions are the Conference of Presidents, formed by the EP’s president and the chairs of the political groups, and in a smaller measure the Conferences of Committees and Delegations Chairs. On the contrary, MP’s framework is relatively simple. The Rules of Procedure, drawn up mainly by the Brazilian representation staff, were adopted in the forth plenary session after difficult negotiations. Differently from the EP, which transformed the right to adopt its own rules in an instrument of interpretation of the treaties in order to extend its power and influence (Judge and Earnshaw, 2003: 196-197), MP’s current Rules detail some Constitutive Protocol previsions without taking the risks of escaping its frame.

The Rules establish that Mercosur parliamentarians are elected by Member States citizens through direct, secret and universal suffrage. As the Parliament has not decided yet about the national representation criteria, each state designs the same number of parliamentarians (eighteen, according to the Constitutive Protocol, and eight for states in process of adhesion). The Bureau is composed by a president and one vice-president of each member state elected for a two-year period, without reelection. Until the first general elections, however, the president is replaced each six months following the Mercosur Temporary Presidency, which entails less coherence to the annual session. Besides administrative tasks, the Bureau shall define the subjects to be treated in plenary sessions and
elaborate with political groups’ coordinators the MP’s labor agenda. Political groups can be formed by five parliamentarians, if they belong to more than one member state or by 10% of the total number of deputies if they have the same nationality. This faculty clearly stimulates the maintenance of a national logic in the assembly. During the discussions, some parliamentarians defended even larger possibilities of constituting political groups with deputies from only one nationality. Until now, there is only one structured group: the National Party, corresponding to the Uruguayan party of the same name, with seven members from Uruguay. The Parliament has as well ten permanent committees: 1) juridical and institutional issues; 2) economic, financial, commercial, fiscal and monetary issues; 3) international, interregional and strategic issues; 4) education, culture, science, technology and sports; 5) labor, employment policies, social security and social economy; 6) sustainable regional development, territorial organization, home, health, environment and tourism; 7) citizenship and human rights; 8) security and defense; 9) infrastructure, transports, energetic sources, agriculture, cattle raising and fishing; 10) budget and internal issues. The Bureau fixes the number of parliamentarians per committee in the beginning of each year. In 2007, it was accorded that this number would vary from four to twelve, each country counting with a similar number of deputies per committee. Temporary and special committees can also be formed to deal with specific issues, as well as external delegations to represent the MP in international organisms and events. According to the Rules, the integration of committees is proportional to the political groups’ composition, but the absence of organized groups has impelled the temporary adoption of the national criteria. The Bureau structuration, the geographical positioning of deputies during the sessions and the debates, when frequently one parliamentarian speaks in the name of his/her national delegation, also reflect this logic. These substantive differences regarding the EP, whose members decided from the very beginning to organize the work in accordance to ideological affinities.

The Common Assembly of the ECSC met once a year, in the second week of May, to analyze the High Authority’s report. Only the Council and the High Authority could convocate extraordinary sessions. Mercosur Parliament’s ordinary sessions shall take place once a month, from February 15th to December 15th. The CMC, the Bureau or 25% of parliamentarians can decide about extraordinary sessions. The Bureau has been meeting also once a month, two weeks before the plenary session. Committees’ reunions are more irregular, due to the lack of structure to organize the agendas. All reunions are public unless they are declared close to public, which requires an absolute majoritarian vote. The Parliamentary Secretariat has five secretaries: Presidency; Parliamentarian; Administrative;
Institutional Relations and Social Communication; International Relations and Integration. The Rules of Procedure silence about their duties and competences and staff nomination. The Parliament compensates its very little personnel with national delegations’ officials, who come to Montevideo during plenary sessions and develop an important part of the work from national assemblies. This precariousness affects the rhythm and the quality of MP’s activities. If committees rarely meet, discussions and decisions about a certain topic may not progress in plenary sessions. In the same sense, the relative publicity of MP’s documents is partially due to this feeble structure. The website is a real advance concerning parliamentarian communication in Mercosur, but there are some missing minutes and proceedings, general information is limited and the diffusion of the site itself is not substantial even among Mercosur’s institutions. Another reason is the historical lack of transparency of Mercosur’s activities. The reports of the Bureau’s meetings, for instance, are expressly not public, even though the Constitutive Protocol and the Rules of Procedure affirm the “most complete transparency” of MP’s activities.

All Parliament documents shall be drawn up in the Mercosur official languages, Portuguese and Spanish. Most of public documents, nevertheless, are only available in Spanish. Sessions should have simultaneous interpretation, but in practice parliamentarians understand each other without this mechanism. It represents a financial advantage and facilitates deliberation in the MP, although the differences between both languages may block a complete understanding, mainly when civil society associations participate in the meetings.

In terms of complexity, the MP and the EP in the fifties are strongly comparable. Both institutions have its own Rules of Procedure, Bureau, Secretariat, committees and political groups prevision. Nonetheless, an important difference is the early organization of political affinities in Europe and the maintenance of the national logic in the firs year of the Mercosur Parliament. Another element to limit the satisfactory complexity level of the MP is the incipient and precarious structuration of the Secretariat and the committees.

2.3. Universalization

Universalization comprehends the processes of unification, objectivization (standardization/formality) and universalism. An institutionalized parliament should consist of a coherent and impersonal collectivity whose rules are clear and public and apply equally
to all actors. The production of its own values, the definition of reproduction mechanisms (recruitment and socialization) and the insertion of formal regulations in a hierarchic system (Delpeuch and Vigour, 2006: 141-142) are some of the main characteristics of such an institution. The Mercosur Parliament seems to be heading in this direction, while its European counterpart has already consolidated these practices.

The lack of transparency mentioned above restricts MP’s universalism. In its first year, personnel were indicated after non-public government agreements, although the Constitutive Protocol determines the realization of open external competitions among citizens of member states to compose technical and administrative staff, like in the European Parliament. The current budget depends on equal contributions from states, but its execution is not available in the website as indicated in the Rules of Procedure, excepted January 2007. MP should as well publish an official journal with its rules, propositions and meetings reports. In practice, not even all the prescribed regulation is available in the website.

Mercosur Parliament’s “competences” actually refer to tasks to be performed by the parliamentarians, such as to watch over the democracy on member states and the respect to Mercosur law. As an entirely intergovernamental system, Mercosur does not have exclusive areas or sectors of its competence, which applies extensively to the MP. It means that all subjects can be discussed or regulated, but the final decision belongs to national institutions. MP counts on some normative instruments to accomplish its duties.

| - Opinions     | Formal statements about legislative projects of the CMC |
| - Legislative projects | Normative propositions presented to the CMC |
| - Legislative draft projects | Normative propositions presented to national parlia
tments in order to harmonize member states law |
| - Declarations | Manifestations about any subject of public interest |
| - Recommendations | General indications to the decisional organs of Mercosur |
| - Reports | Studies about specific subjects made by MP’s committees |
| - Disposals | Administrative rules about MP’s internal organization |

During the first year, the Parliament has adopted eight disposals\(^8\), six declarations and two recommendations, which seem to be the less efficient instruments to intervene in Mercosur directions.

\(^8\) The disposals that are not available in the website were requested twice to the Secretariat of the Mercosur Parliament, without response. They may concern staff nomination.
The adopted normative consists of administrative determinations and rhetorical manifestations about subjects relating predominantly to disputes among national political forces. Debates about integration issues or about the role and the objectives of the Parliament itself did not become rules. An exception is a disposal adopting the political agenda of Mercosur, which fixes Parliament’s priority subjects including elements like the relations between MP and CMC, the current status of Mercosur integration, MP’s communication, natural resources, migration and customs duties. The report about the human rights situation in the region, a substantial task of the MP according to the Constitutive Protocol, was not elaborated. This scenario reveals the fragile degree of formality of MP’s actions and limits the construction of an institutional project.

Universalization appears to be somewhere in between autonomy and complexity in the current Mercosur Parliament structure. Rules are universal regarding actors, but the lack of transparency and regulation about staff nomination implies a limited access to these functions. Similar remarks concern the reproduction mechanisms, though there were not public discussions in the assembly or in other sectors of Mercosur, neither in national political parties, about when exactly and how will be organized the general elections. In spite of the fact that the production of rules is incipient and still does not reveal the strategy and the values of the Parliament, the approval of the Rules of Procedure was an important step.

2.4. Socialization
If the development of the attributes above mentioned—autonomy, complexity, universalization—is part of legislatures’ establishment, they are not sufficient to characterize a consolidated institution. “For a parliament it is a matter of coming to embody values shared in some significant degree by the society at large. Moreover, a clear line cannot be drawn between the institution and its members: it is how they behave within the normative framework set by the institution that determines its character and perhaps its chances of survival” (Johnson, 1995: 609). This process refers to the parliamentary socialization, which can take forms such as a) adaptation to the institutional role, b) increased institutional support and c) ideological convergence (Navarro, 2005: 6). In terms of regional integration, it means the progressive strengthen of communitarian convictions among the deputies is as important aspect of the socialization process (b), but not the only one. The acquisition of new skills and understandings, related to the traditions and procedures of an assembly (a), and the shape of preferences, which tend to harmonize and moderate political demands and policy goals (c), are aspects of the parliamentarian experience that cannot be neglected.

There is still much research on the socialization in the European Parliament which needs to be carried out, but the idea that the EP accomplishes an “integration function” by socializing the members is widely accepted. Empirical information shall confirm or not this hypothesis depending on the different variants of the socialization phenomenon. A survey data analysis, relating to the attitudes of members of the European Parliament between 1996 and 2000, shows that the experience in the EP does not socialize deputies into more pro-European attitudes (Scully, 2005). The author concludes that there is little evidence that MEPs are more pro-integration than their national counterparts, and when it happens it appears unrelated to deputies’ length of service in the EP. In the same sense, an analysis of roll-call voting data from 1999 plenary sessions evidence that MEPs do not become more inclined to support measures of closer integration as the time passes (Ibid). The fact that the EP has constantly pushed for more European integration and for a more significant role in the institutional design (Costa, 2001; Costa and Magnette, 2003) cannot be explained, then, by parliamentary socialization in the European level, but by national politics. MEPs belong to national parties, which, in general, have historically supported the integration process. Among them, euro-scepticism has been the exception. “MEPs are generally pro-integration for the same reasons that national MPs are: they are members, and representatives, of parties for whom such views are part of accepted, mainstream political opinion” (Scully, 2005: 142). The interest of the deputies in increasing their powers is also due to its strategic importance. MEPs understand since their arrival in Brussels that the institutional competition within the
Union will leave them little space if they do not carry out their role actively (Costa, 2001: 66).

On the other hand, the institutional framework of the EP has a significant impact on members’ behavior, even if parliamentarians do not necessarily interiorize a common understanding of their role or converge in their attitudes (Navarro, 2005: 21). There is parliamentary socialization in the European stage: deputies learn about the assembly’s formal and informal rules, realize which are the most efficient procedures and patterns of behavior, discover how to work with colleagues from different nationalities, acquire new professional skills and understanding of politics. In addition, although political cleavages in the EP are structured according to right-wing/left-wing and integration/sovereignty positions (Hix, 2001; Noury, 2002), the deliberation process reveals a more complex logic. The absence of an European government, the nature of texts submitted to the assembly’s appreciation and, more generally, the mobilization around the consensual and “non political” objective of conforming an “union”, which characterized the European construction, result in a relative fragility of party phenomenon, fluidity of majoritarian combinations and a consensus building that surpasses traditional ideological divisions (Costa, 2001: 328). Moreover, treaties force deputies to overcome their heterogeneity if they want to take part in the decision-making process. But these features are not necessarily related to ideological convergence among deputies: the inclination to vote with EP or group majority is not connected with ancientness or previous political experience (Navarro, 2007: 217-218).

Due to its short period of existence and incipient activities, precise conclusions about socialization within the Mercosur Parliament are very limited. In general, an adaptation to the institutional role seems to rise among some deputies. If it is true that the accommodation process is more significant in the EP than the assimilation one, MP faces an inverse situation. As the assembly is still new and procedures are rising, rules are to be created more than to be followed. Each national delegation conceives the parliament according to its own political culture and constitutional system. Moreover, each parliamentarian devises the assembly depending on his/her ideological orientation and on his/her general idea of Mercosur. For instance, during a debate about the partial reform of the Rules of Procedure in order to enable the discussions to continue even without quorum, a Paraguayan deputy mentioned the surprise of his delegation with such a possibility, opposed to their national rule.

9 “No voy a poner ninguna objeción, al contrario, felicito a la Comisión por el trabajo extraordinario que hicieron buscando una posición intermedia. Pero no puedo dejar de señalar, Presidente, que es una novedad para nosotros, fundamentalmente para los parlamentarios paraguayos, que al no existir quórum continúe la sesión y se siga
quite normal situation: creation never occurs without integration and maintenance of old values with the new (Dawson and Prewitt, 1969: 27). But it is important to pay attention to the rigidity level of this sort of variable, which may influence the accommodation/assimilation balance in the Mercosur Parliament in the following years, and consequently its institutionalization degree.

The coherence mentioned by Huntington, March and Olsen is related to socialization. The more socialized is an institution, the more members will agree about its functions and objectives and the decision-making process will be less troubling. In the case of Mercosur Parliament, registers show a limited consensus about the real role of the assembly. There are at least two instruments discussed by the parliamentarians with such content: the Montevideo Charter and the Disposal 4 about the political agenda. The Charter was proposed by the Brazilian delegation and adopted during the second plenary session in order to symbolically publicize MP’s goals. However, the text is fluid and does not surpass the usual agreements about democratic liberties, human rights and the consultative role of the Parliament, even if the necessity of reinforcing the political integration is stressed. The political agenda was approved in the third plenary session. Although the document intends to establish MP’s first objectives and activities, it also reveals a conception about the assembly. The survey to reach a diagnosis about the respect of treaties and the current functioning of Mercosur and the analysis on how to improve the rapport CMC-Parliament denote a minimum common perspective about Parliament’s place in the integration structure.

Nonetheless, the contrast between the deliberation and the final decision exposes the difficulty of the parliamentarians in building a project to the institution they represent. Themes like infrastructure, poverty and social inequality and the construction of the Mercosur citizenship were referred by some parliamentarians and not included in the agenda. The ratification of Venezuela Adhesion Protocol in Brazil and Paraguay also divided the deputies: some of them...
did not consider it as a regional issue, because “the Mercosur Parliament can not ask sovereign national parliaments for any attitudes or steps”. The work program of MP’s presidency of the second semester of 2007 dealt with the question of MP’s responsibilities, but it does not represent a collective opinion. According to the president, the elements that should guide MP’s discussions and activities are the legislative capacity of the Parliament, an effective representation of citizen’s interests, the construction of communitarian sovereignty, the economic development within Mercosur and a reasonable project concerning a global integration in Latin America. A paradigmatic debate about the Parliament’s functions in the integration process took place during the fifth plenary session. Points of divergence emerged, although all speeches agreed in the fundamental role of the MP regarding the necessity of surpassing the commercial integration and reinforcing Mercosur mechanisms in order to reach social inclusion, sustainable development and international influence. It means that, even if the institution still does not have a clear project, the deliberation itself reflects that deputies accept debating the functions and the mechanisms of the Parliament. Consequently, they recognize the legitimacy of the institution and the principle of a supranational and reflexive deliberation, which may have a significant influence on the other powers of the MP (Costa, 2001 : 483).

Simple participation in plenary sessions traduces another socialization benchmarck if it means the recognizing of a suplementary level where political life takes place. The studied period reveal a stable and relatively elevated level of presences, if the last meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Committee are considered. Brazil and Uruguay display the highest participation degree. About Venezuela, the temporary lack of voting faculty and the geographical distance may explain the feeble presence in reunions. The EP faces an opposed phenomenon: absenteeism has been a problem from the Parliament’s earliest days. Deputies who had to travel furthest attended least (Kapteyn apud Westlake, 1994 : 102).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average number of deputies present in reunions</th>
<th>Total of deputies</th>
<th>Average percentage of participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>13,7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>76,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>96,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>96,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>4,7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>79,8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of support to integration and ideological convergence, outcomes are even more restricted. Until now, the procedure to indicate the regional parliamentarians was
internal to each congress. The choice and arrangements to compose the representation in the Mercosur Parliament were analogous to the formation of other national parliamentary committees: membership was mostly self-selected. Just like in the beginning of the European Parliament, members of the MP were indicated according to some sort of interest for integration matters. Many of them were already implicated in the JPC and participated in the negotiations that lead to the Parliament rise. But this “affinity” with integration is clearly less important in Mercosur than it was in the European Union, where the Common Assembly of the ECSC developed an open militant federalism in favour of further steps towards integration (Westlake, 1994 : 11). With direct elections, the tendency is a reproduction of the European phenomenon: parties will point out candidates pro-integration or politicians either retreated from political national life or desiring to start a career. Further research shall confirm a movement drafted since the start of Mercosur which seems to continue in the MP: parliamentarians of left-wing, from smaller countries and from frontier regions are more inclined to work actively for the integration process. For the moment, it is inevitable to conclude that the majority of Haas’ characteristics of a political community do not apply to the Mercosur Parliament, also because Mercosur intergovernamental structure restricts the possibility of the Parliament in accomplishing the central conditions. The discussions about the proportional representation criteria, postponed to 2008, may allow new remarks on this point. It is useful to highlight that the 78 deputies of the Assembly of the ECSC were designated proportionally to national populations but considering a favorable balance to the smaller states (Germany 18, Belgium 10, France 18, Italy 18, Luxembourg 4 and Netherlands 10), which still distinguishes the European Parliament.

To summarize, the limited conclusions about socialization in the MP reveal a) essays to construct the new institution by assimilation of former experiences and an elevated degree of participation of actors; b) different levels of institutional support among deputies and absence of active pro-integration attitudes of the MP towards other Mercosur’s institutions and c) ideological convergence restricted to general discussions and important divergences about issues related to the integration process. The general limited socialization is related to the institutionalization process itself: to develop an integrative function of its members, an institution has to be autonomous, complex and display universal values and rules. The weak structuration of the Mercosur Parliament does not make it politically attractive to deputies and consequently do not facilitate their socialization.

Conclusion
The classical assumption that the Mercosur is far from the European Union in terms of institutionalization does not apply to the beginning of its parliamentary history. The Mercosur Parliament and the Common Assembly of the ECSC show similar characteristics and fragilities. But half a century and a considerable amount of integration experiences set apart both institutions. If the Mercosur Parliament rises after (and based on) the European trajectory and many other regional essays, the expected institutionalization should be achieved even faster than in the European Parliament. This is not the current situation, though. The initial hypothesis is apparently confirmed: the MP displays a minimum degree of institutionalization. The limits increase approximatively in this order: complexity, universalization, socialization and autonomy. But if this starting level of institutionality does not progress in the next years, it will not be able to eventually support parliamentary influence in defining the directions of the integration process. For the moment, the Mercosur Parliament does not hold conditions equivalent to the European Parliament bases and it is not likely to grow in the same path. The MP rises with some positive points regarding the EP: direct elections are planned to four years after its creation and deliberation is easier because of language facilities. But the negative points are comparatively larger: European parliamentarians sit from the very beginning according to political affiliation, relations between the executive branch and the assembly were relatively balanced and actors developed an open militant federalism. The result is that, “in terms of formal powers, the EP has undergone much more significant growth than any other institution since the Communities came into existence” (Shackleton, 2002 : 96).

The institutionalization level of the MP is restricted considering traditional parliaments in general and the EP in special, but it brings an important innovation to the Mercosur institutional framework. In his last speech in the presidency, one of MP’s presidents presented a balance of the first year of the Parliament. He stressed the fact that the MP exists and has been working with almost all members, who have selected committees’ members and the Bureau, approved the Rules of Procedure and started discussing the integration fundamentals. In addition, according to the deputy, the acting together of twenty-two different political parties from five different countries shows a pluralistic and democratic belief which should stimulate a communitarian construction. In fact, two main possibilities arise from the creation of the Parliament: the direct elections of its members and the conformation of spaces for citizenship participation, which could engender substantial representation and impact.

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national elites and interest groups (Ajenjo Fresno, 2007). But it depends on whether Mercosur parliamentarians decide to come to meetings to keep their seats warm or to lead the integration process.\(^ {13} \)

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\(^ {13} \) “Nosotros, como Parlamento del Mercosur, no tenemos que venir solamente a calentar sillas. Nosotros debemos ser protagonistas dentro de este proceso de integración, fundamentalmente por la calidad de los actores políticos que integran este Parlamento regional.” Parliamentarian speech, III MP plenary session, Montevideo, May 8th 2007.
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