



The ideology of regionalism in Argentinean foreign policy post-2003

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There is a distinction between historically organic ideologies, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalists, “willed”. Those historically necessary have a validity that is “psychological: they organize human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. As “arbitrary “only create individual “movements”, produce controversy, etc. (though even these are not completely futile, since they function like the error, which contrasts with the truth consolidating it) (Gramsci, 1994).

Abstract: After 2003, Argentina went through a significant change in its foreign policy strategies, in the specific field of regional integration. These principles are based on the prioritization of the political link within the Southern Cone and with Latin-American countries as a primary platform. They include the defence of democracy and human rights, the respect of sovereignty and self-determination. These principles are supplemented by multilateral action in the global scene, keeping pacifist positions in matter of defence and appealing to common interests with other countries of the region in commercial issues. This is the essence of what local policy-makers call the Argentinean project of regional integration, and what we call the ideology of regionalism, that has been consolidated as an important pillar of political strategies used by both Nestor Kirchner’s and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner’s administrations.

Introduction

The aim of this work is to establish if in the Argentinian case, the struggle and the assembly of various stakeholders has effectively allowed the construction of an ideological body that acts at the highest and more visible level of Argentinean foreign policy and is state policy, and if we can decompose this ideology into well identifiable principles that constitute an ideal, project or model of region.

This research argues that Argentina has erected since 2003 to date an ideology of regionalism, often called "project of region" or "model of regional integration", which supports and justifies its profile options on this area and that is based on: (i) the hierarchy of

political links with countries of the Southern Cone and the whole Latin America, appealing to common interests and identities, (ii) the regional unit for the defence of democracy, human rights and social justice, (iii) joint diplomatic action with the region in international forums on issues of sovereignty and self-determination, (iv) the region as a basis for promoting international multilateralism, (v) the region as shelter and protection on the national strategy of a pacifist profile in defence issues, (vi) coordination of common interests with the region in trade as a way of fortress for international economic negotiations. The work will firstly contextualise the framework within which this process has been developed. Following, speeches and diplomatic actions will be considered, while in the second half of the paper the regional link between politics and community and interest on the large region will be analysed.

History, present and ideological design

As stories usually do, this one starts with a great crash. Or maybe two, as in 2001 collapsed almost simultaneously the Twin Towers, as the most important symbol of global hegemonic power, while in Argentina an helicopter with the departing president Fernando De la Rúa flying away from the Casa Rosada, closing a cycle, a paradigm and its narrative. After the 2001 Argentinean social crash, the need of changing the basis of both internal and external political logic became obvious. The crisis was extended to every institution and corporations, which have had the role of representing the voice of the people. This forced, at least for a while, a sort of *dearistocratisation* of political decision-making. At the end, this was more a rhetorical than a practical process. After the outbreak, traditional parties and institutions were those which yet had the best organisational tools for the new scene, changing its ladders for others capable of assuming the new discursive and program.

It was April 2003 when democratic elections opened a new scenario. Nevertheless, almost 25 per cent of votes went for an old character in the Argentinean political arena: Carlos Menem. While this percentage in the first round gave him the first position, Menem declined a second ballot when it became clear that candidates best positioned behind his position would join forces to defeat him. Thus, Nestor Kirchner, who had been promoted as Eduardo

Duhalde's candidate, and had obtained 22 per cent of votes, was elected president of Argentina. With an initial weakness due to the low percentage of votes, a social situation in suspense and the too powerful Duhalde's shadow, Kirchner accepted the challenge to produce political change required by the Argentinean society. He began to raise and institutionalise alternative proposals, clearly opposed to the ones of the previous period.

We will use the concept of ideological designer or ideology meaning the creation of a benchmark to apprehend reality. Although the notion of ideology has had a pejorative meaning in the tradition of classic Marxism because associated to the false consciousness and the way used by the ruling class to use rules of the entire society to make their own economic and general interests, we are grounded in the *sui generis* version, related with Gramsci revisionism (Gramsci, 1994) or Sartre existentialism (1987). For them, ideologists do not create a systemic philosophy but make conscious their epoch, update historic notions and develop principles capable to relate social needs and interests of determinate time framework with the history of the political and philosophical thought.

We cannot say that the Argentinean orientation has been unique, neither in domestic nor in foreign policy. It has been characterized, instead, by its eclecticism, with components that alternates the satisfaction of various different actors and interest groups at the same time. This apparent lack of clarity has been twitching for some political scientists and scholars in general and for those specialised in international studies in particular:

“No one imagined what he had under his poncho and that he would carry out a foreign policy that did not fit in any of the previous platforms but either built a new benchmark, being confused in its guidance, petty in their objectives, unprofessional in their implementation and strongly conditioned by internal politics” (Rusell, 2010)

A political economic perspective leads us to think about competing interests and, ultimately, a distributive struggle (of wealth and power). These processes are located within both the international concert and the domestic space, inside the state / civil society complex, that could explain the following options. On one hand, that “national interest” is composed by multiple collective wills and interests, and on the other and that foreign policy options are

always prioritising and benefiting some of these wills and interests over others or, in the best case, balancing them or tending to do so. Every state policy is the outcome of this struggle as well as it gives an ideological direction to the course of future action (Russel, 2010).

According to the conception of foreign policy as public policy (Lasagna, 1996), and public policy as one delineated from a parameter of social welfare, the term ideology refers to the conception about how power, wealth and knowledge must be concentrated or distributed among different sectors to reach welfare. However, at the same time each sector will develop its own tools for the struggle, as organisation and alliances. From this framework, we see that the not fully solved dynamic between stakeholders (importers, exporters, social organizations, multinationals, domestic companies, unions, investors, etc.) in dispute within the Argentine state post-2001, succeeded in influencing the Argentine government manoeuvres in various different directions, hence the essentially eclectic decisions of state policy during these years. However, we suppose its strategic sense has been altered and, confronting the precedent corpus of ideas, we can observe the neoliberal ideology has been applied. Private interests of financial groups replace an absent national bourgeoisie and the state is used as a tool to erode the social framework, minimising it to an essential expression and simply ensuring national bourgeoisie's endless enrichment.

In order to briefly characterise the foreign policy shaped in the neoliberal era we must review structural factors that matched a profound change in the international arena and provoked a new global architecture. When in the early 1990s the Soviet Union and communism eventually dissolved, the United States reacted to the end of bipolarity by changing the strategy of containment for one of supremacy, imposing a predominant offensive military action in order to be fully conceived as a global power. On one hand, this model gave an unusual prominence to the U.S. military in political decision making. The Grand Strategy became a Pentagon decision rather than a choice by the State Department. On the other hand, a group of international institutions arisen from the economic-social-spiritual western way of life suddenly became representatives of universal rights and obligations, guarding the interests of the big hegemonic power.

This moment of American splendour set the tone in many intellectual circles and in the

society at large. There was no world beyond the one brought forth by the conflict of the twentieth century and, taking the well-known Fukuyama's sentence, history was over (Fukuyama, 1992). At end of the last century, Hobsbawm noted with concern that the world was becoming a single operating unit with a clear breakdown of old patterns of human relations and a rupture between past and present:

“Globalisation is a word that became fashionable in the 1990s to describe a process and an ideology (...) as an ideology, the utopic aspiration of the globalisation doctrine towards global opening and cooperation fits well with the idealist American tradition of rejection to power politics of the European continental realism (...) The current globalisation process has as a new data the virtually global scope of the process, the close relationship between the process in terms of economic and cultural globalisation and the global military scale projection and cultural power of the United States, and the emergence of a global economic elite, ideologically and culturally committed to the process of globalisation and blind to national states. Its universal language is American English and its flag is the one of the multinational company it represents” (Hobsbawn, 1994: 15-16).

What Hobsbawn names global elite found in Argentina a country with no national elite nor consolidated bourgeoisie. This structural condition made of Argentina one of the preferential enclaves for the development of financial capital activities. Besides, it could associate with the social sector diffusely called the middle class, composed of potential importers and their networks, as well as professionals and petty bourgeoisie. During Menem's administration, actors became part of the middle class received personal loans and instalments financing to purchase goods and services necessary for the development of economic and financial policies favoured by the government. They were also given the opportunity of a national currency stuck to the dollar that enabled them to buy and move their business around the world.

During the 1990s these structural factors contextualised Argentina's foreign policy design. The national interest was mainly addressed to the production of foreign private capital profits which, according to the logic of the trickle-down effect, would no longer concentrate but leak to other social sectors. According to Corigliano:

“Both Menem and Domingo Cavallo and their foreign minister Guido Di Tella gave birth to a foreign policy designed with a mercantilist shape, in which the U.S. government was a priority as an influential player in the provision of credit from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank” (Corigliano, 2007: 69).

Moreover, establishing improvements and strengthening mechanisms of regional market a higher level of competitiveness was needed. Based on the Argentine-Brazilian bilateral agreements that had started with the Declaration of Foz de Iguazu in 1985 and associated Acts and Treaties of integration, in 1990 neoliberal presidents Menem and Collor signed the Memorandum of Buenos Aires that guided the integration strategy to the creation of a common market. The deadline to create it was fixed for late 1994, and it had to work on the basis of generalized and automatic reductions for the whole tariff universe with the simultaneous elimination of non-tariff barriers. The influence of international financial institutions in heavily indebted countries such as the ones in South America, led to political stability and structural adjustment programs based on market opening, privatisation, deregulation of economic activities and fiscal discipline.

As noted by the economist Aldo Ferrer (2006: 199-209), the release of imports and the search for a closer integration in the global market produced its greatest impact on the regional space. This was the area where centripetal forces of globalisation and market openness demonstrated its greater vigour. That was what happened in European market, in North America, in the Asia-Pacific region, and what occurred in Latin America too (2006: 199-209). This process was ratified with the signing of the Asuncion Treaty in 1991 and then when obtaining legal status under the Protocol of Ouro Preto in 1995, which successfully consolidated Mercosur as an intra-regional trade area.

At this stage it becomes clear that we do not interpret Argentina as an unequivocal and rational nation that acts according to its capacities in a given international order. But neither we are interested in the analysis of domestic actors and drivers, even accepting that they exist and they are essential for the development of this discipline.

Speeches and Diplomatic action

As it is pointed out by Merke, there is a difference of view regarding the meaning of regionalism between academics and politicians or diplomats. The author proposes a synthesis of these different views of regionalism. He interprets it as a phenomenon that is “no more than a social construction where a relevant community comes to believe that a regional project is not only possible but desirable” (2010: 545). Taking into account this definition, we will make a distinction between ideological and material zones of that construction, in order to explore in depth its ideological dimension, which guides and orders the course of policies decisions in the field of regional integration. While this notion coincides with the region being a cognitive process of identity construction (the regional “we”) shown by Merke, we also incorporate the weight of ideological principles, vying for the ultimate meaning of integration.

One of the pathways needed to establish the ideological design is the trace of speeches. It does not mean that words can be taken as translucent tools to describe processes, but that the narrative constitutes the world that is being described. In this sense, the reading of the most representative decision-makers’ speeches constitutes a testimony of interactions and relationships occurred at the time of its utterance (Mariani, 1996). Nevertheless, the monitoring of high-level diplomatic activity was what became really relevant to observe profiles and forecast trends. This is the reason why we have worked in the development of commitments made by Argentinean diplomacy and what they could reveal about the ideology of regionalism. In sum, we analysed both Presidents and their Chancellors’ speeches as the diplomatic action carried out by them, on the witness years of 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2010.¹

From 2 January 2002, until 25 May 2003, Eduardo Duhalde was the Argentinean President and Carlos Ruckauf its foreign minister. On 27 April 2003 national elections were held and on 25 May, Néstor Kirchner started his administration, appointing Rafael Bielsa as the Foreign Affairs Minister. Eduardo Duhalde came to occupy the directorship of the Mercosur Permanent Representatives Committee. During the same year, Argentina participated at six

¹ Own elaboration of documents obtained at the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult of Argentina. Available at: <http://tratados.cancilleria.gov.ar/busqueda.php> Last seen: August 2012.

summits meetings, three of which were regional² and the other half extra-regional³. In addition, Argentina signed twelve multilateral treaties (in 33.3 per cent of which Argentina was part of a regional group, in all cases it was the Mercosur), and a hundred bilateral treaties with other countries (fifty-five per cent with a region stakeholder). As for presidential and chancellor official visits made to or from Argentina, the eighty-two per cent of them took place within the region⁴.

The importance of the year 2005 is given by the development of the Summit of the Americas and its counterpart, the Popular Summit, held in Mar del Plata (supported by the Argentinean government and other governments of the region), in which the U.S. initiative of the Free Trade Area of the Americas -FTAA- was aborted, while the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas -ALBA- was launched by the Venezuelan government. In the same year Rafael Bielsa occupied the place of Chancellor of Argentina until November, when he was succeeded by Jorge Taiana. At the same time, Argentina participated in seven presidential summits, counting the aforementioned IV Summit of the Americas, and adding four regional⁵ and three international⁶ summits to the former. Argentina also signed forty-five multilateral treaties (73.3 per cent signed as part of a regional group of countries), and one hundred and ten bilateral treaties with other countries (sixty-six per cent with a regional stakeholder). As well as for Argentinean presidential official visits, the eighty-nine per cent were regionally held (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult of Argentina website).

Considering the year 2008 it is important to underline it was the first year of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner administration, for which Jorge Taiana remained in charge as Chancellor. During that year a striking amount of regional summits were held, with the

² XVII Rio Group Presidents Summit, Cuzco, 23 and 24 May 2003; XXIV MERCOSUR Presidents Summit, Asuncion, Paraguay, 18 June 2003; XXV MERCOSUR Presidents Summit, Montevideo, Uruguay, 16 December 2003

³ Progressives Governments Summit, London, 14 and 15 July 2003; 58^o U.N. General Assembly, New York, 25 September 2003; XIII Iberoamerican Heads of State and Government Summit, Santa Cruz de la Sierra Bolivia, 14 and 15 November 2003.

⁴ Own elaboration of documents obtained at the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult of Argentina. Available at: <http://tratados.cancilleria.gov.ar/busqueda.php> Last seen: August 2012.

⁵ XXVIII MERCOSUR Presidents' Summit, Asunción, 18 and 19 July 2005 - Kirchner did not attend personally but sent a representative; First South American United Nations Community Summit, Brasilia, 29 and 30 September 2005; IV Summit of the Americas, Mar del Plata, 4 and 5 November 2005; XXIX MERCOSUR Presidents' Summit, Montevideo, Uruguay, 9 December 2005.

⁶ III Summit of South American and Arab Countries, Brasilia, 10 and 11 May 2005; XV Iberoamerican Summit, Salamanca, 14 and 15 October 2005; World Summit on the opening of the 60th United Nations Organization General Assembly, New York, 14 and 15 September 2005; XX Rio Group Presidents' Summit, Santo Domingo, 7 March 2008; UNASUR Presidential Summit, Brasilia, 23 May 2008, XXXV MERCOSUR Presidents' Summit, Tucuman, 1 July 2008; Second Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of UNASUR, Santiago de Chile, 15 September 2008; XXXVI MERCOSUR Presidents' Summit, Sauipe, Bahia, Brazil, 16 December 2008; First Summit of Presidents and Heads of State of Latin America and the Caribbean (CALC), Sauipe, Bahia, Brazil, 16 and 17 December 2008; Special Meeting of UNASUR, Sauipe, Bahia, Brazil, December 16th, Special Meeting of Heads of State and Government in Group of Rio, Bahia, Brazil, 16 December 2008. More information available at: <http://cancilleria.gov.ar/busqueda.php> Last seen: August 2012.

accompaniment of Argentina that attended them with its highest representation. Taking into account presidential summits attended by Cristina Fernandez, eight out of eleven were regional⁷ and only three⁸ were not. During this year, multilateral treaties signed by Argentina were eleven (54.5 per cent as part of a regional body), and bilateral treaties signed between Argentina and other countries summed 166 (51.8 per cent of them were signed with a regional stakeholder). Moreover, among Argentinean official presidential and chancellor visits to other countries, the seventy-five per cent of them occurred regionally.

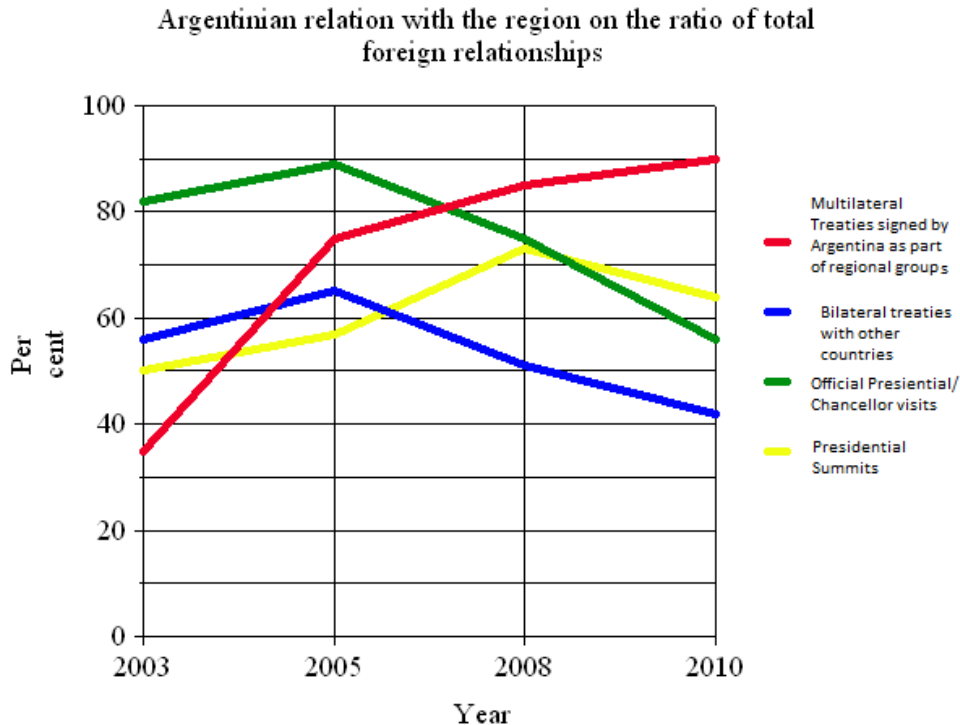
Finally, 2010 was the year of the Bicentennial of the first Argentinian National Government, and it represented a remarkable moment in the historical period we want to analyse because Nestor Kirchner, former president and husband of the latter President Cristina Fernandez, was elected as General Secretary of the Union of South American Nations -UNASUR. On June 22 of the same year, the Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana was succeeded in his function by Hector Timerman but unfortunately four months later Néstor Kirchner passed away. These events did not alter Argentina's participation to international summits taking part to ten of them. Coherently to the previous trend, five out of ten summits Argentina attended were regional⁹ and the other half from outside the region.¹⁰ Argentina subscribed twenty multilateral treaties (seventy-five per cent as part of a regional group), and one hundred and twenty-nine bilateral treaties with countries (41.4 per cent with a regional stakeholder). During this year, Argentinean official presidential and chancellor visits within the region decreased, representing the fifty-six per cent of the total (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult of Argentina website).

⁸ V Summit of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union, Lima, 16 May 2008; XVIII Iberoamerican Summit, San Salvador, 30 and 31 October 2008; G-20 Summit, Washington, 15 and November 2008.

⁹ XXI Rio Group Summit and II Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean on Integration and Development (CALC), Riviera Maya, Mexico, 23 February 2010; Extraordinary Council of Heads of State and Government of the Union of South American Nations, Los Cardales, Province of Buenos Aires, 4 May 2010; XXXIX Mercosur Presidential Summit, San Juan, Argentina, 29 and 30 July 2010, Extraordinary Council of Heads of State and Government of the Union of South American Nations, Buenos Aires, 1 October 2010; XL Mercosur Presidential Summit, Foz do Iguacu, Brazil 17 and 18 December 2010.

¹⁰ Summit on Nuclear Safety of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Washington, 12 and 13 April 2010, VI Summit Latin America and the Caribbean-European Union, Madrid, 17 to 18 May 2010; G20 Summit, Toronto, Canada, 26 and 27 June 2010, XX Ibero-American Summit in November, Mar del Plata Summit of the G20, Seoul, South Korea, 12 November 2010

Taking into account information on the amount and type of Argentinean summit participation shown in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, the quantitative ratio of Argentinean relation with the region in the mentioned areas can be graphed as follows:



Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult of Argentina.

Politics and community in the regional links

The first remarkable point shown by considered documents of regional summits and bilateral or multilateral Argentinean agreements with other countries of the region is a repeated reference to politics as the centre of every process or level of integration. In terms of discourse we can observe the same trend: Nestor Kirchner underlined the importance of the regional project in his inauguration speech on 25 May 2003, asserting ‘Mercosur and Latin American integration must be part of a truly regional political project’ (Kirchner, 2003). This is an important gauge of the weight of those political ties with the neighbour countries. During years considered in this work, the political agenda prevailed in both the twenty

regional summits as well as in every bilateral and multilateral treaty signed among countries of the region. Then, it can be said that politics is the heart of the ideology of regionalism, it is the factory where design, aspirations and necessary alliances emerge.

In this context, part of topics related to the regional ideological construction refers to its geographical delimitation. It means that the term *region* can be used to denominate different spaces. On one hand, it can be referred to those countries contained in the Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay), on the other hand it can be related to those countries geographically related to the Southern Cone (those above plus Chile and Bolivia), or even to South America (adding Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and probably Trinidad and Tobago), Latin America or the countries "at the south of the Rio Bravo" (which includes Central America and Mexico). The different delimitation of the region depends on the regional tie being discussed.

In both speeches and the Joint Statement subscribed by Argentina since 2003, it is shown how the word *region* means mainly Mercosur and the Southern Cone when trade and infrastructure issues are chosen as relevant topics. However, in the search of community unity for negotiations with other country blocs, the term *region* refers to South America and, as time went by, this limit has spread until finding in Latin America the larger and most comprehensive regional design. That explains how forums of discussion created in this macro-level and decisions are complementary and intertwined. The Rio Group, the South American Nations Union (UNASUR) and the Summit of Latin-America and the Caribbean (CALC), later Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States (CELAC), are different forums that works on the same concept of region but relating it to different groups of countries. It is remarkable that during the time framework considered, notwithstanding the intense political bilateral relation between Venezuela and Argentina, read by some authors as a preference relationship (Corigliano, 2008), the ALBA has not conformed the Argentinean ideological construction of regional integration.¹¹ Another remarkable point is

¹¹The first time Venezuela's President, Hugo Chavez, officially presented the ALBA project to Argentinian President, Néstor Kirchner, was in his visit on august 19th, 2003, as it appears in the Joint Declaration they signed in that occasion. From that moment on, Argentinian government never mentioned it as part of its construction and it does not appear as part of any other treaty Argentina signed after that.

the fact that the term *region* hardly ever appears with a continental meaning, especially after 2005 when the negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas failed.

Actually, in relation to bilateral relationships, the diplomatic and political link after 2003 has been mainly focused in South America, especially based in Brazil, Venezuela, and with different intensity, Chile. We understand that this is due to the combination of two components: the ideological proximity with presidents (Lula Da Silva,¹² Hugo Chávez¹³ and Ricardo Lagos-Michelle Bachelet¹⁴) and the material fact that countries they were leading are some of the most important South American economies. The relation between ideological and economic factor was not so close with those countries which only met one of these characteristics, for example with the progressive presidents of Ecuador¹⁵, Paraguay¹⁶, or Uruguay¹⁷, or economies of Colombia and Mexico gravitating around the United States. This is shown in the following graphs:

¹² President of Brazil since 2003 to the end of 2010

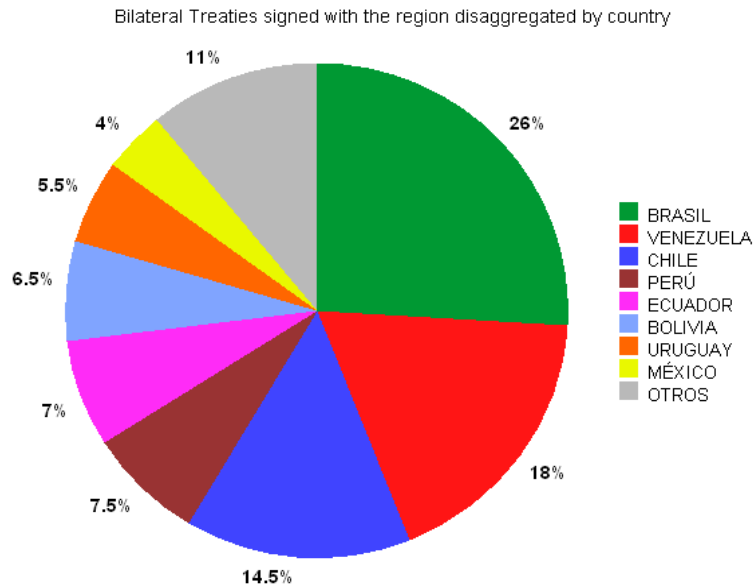
¹³ President of Venezuela since 1998

¹⁴ Consecutive Presidents of Chile 1999-2005 and 2006-2010

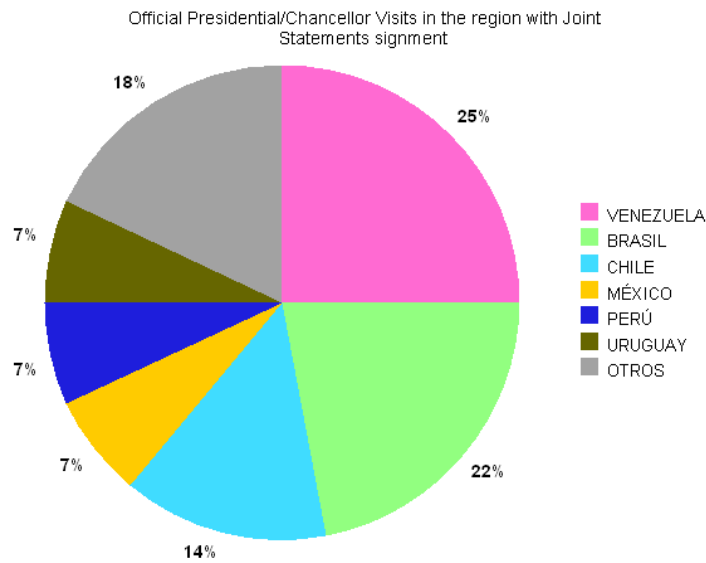
¹⁵ Rafael Correa was the President of Ecuador since 2006.

¹⁶ Fernando Lugo rules in Paraguay since 2008.

¹⁷ Tabaré Vázquez was the President of Uruguay from 2005 to 2010. It is necessary to mention that the particularly weak relationship between Argentina and Uruguay from 2003 to 2010 was mainly due to the bilateral conflict arising from the installation of pulp mills on the River Uruguay. The case was finally closed in 2010 with the Report of the International Court of Justice and the relationship was officially re-launched.



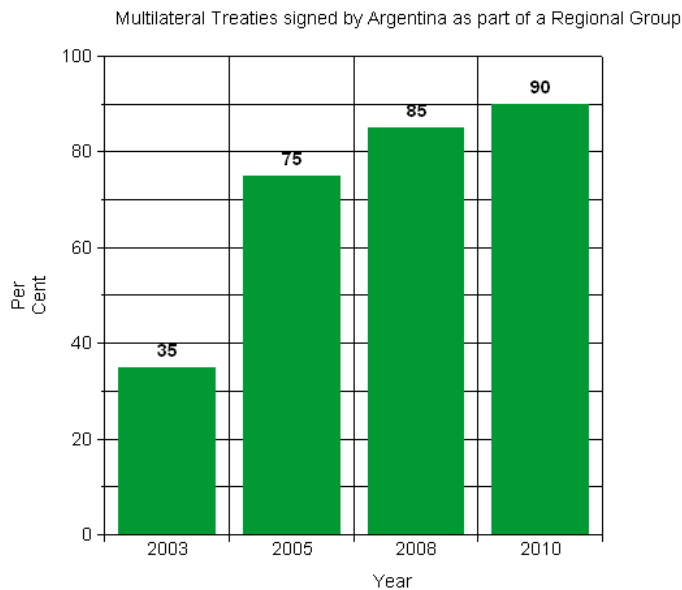
Source: Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Argentina.



Source: Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Argentina.

On the one hand, this axis A-B-V-C (Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and Chile) constitutes the majority of Argentinean bilateral relationships, being the energetic integration the most

mentioned issue in this type of approaches. Inversion and cooperation in transport, infrastructure, technology, human resources and capacities related to the energetic alignment were the absolute priority in the relationship, not only between Argentina and these countries, but also in the regional projection of their joint initiatives. On the other hand, at the multilateral level, the weight of the agreements in the regional space has been growing. We can note changes from only the thirty-three per cent of treaties signed by Argentina in 2003 as part of a regional area (Mercosur), to seventy-one per cent in 2005 (not only in the framework of Mercosur, but also in other meetings between more than two South American countries). In 2008, those multilateral treaties signed by Argentina as Mercosur or UNASUR member increased to eighty-two per cent and in 2010 grew to ninety per cent.



Source: Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Argentina.

The interest for the Region

From 2003 onwards it is possible to observe, not only from Argentina but across the region, a renewed interest from Latin-America for itself (Malamud, 2009). The wave of regional summits and the permanent reference to the region in foreign and local politics appeared, with nuances and differences, in Latin America as a whole. The economic and political crisis

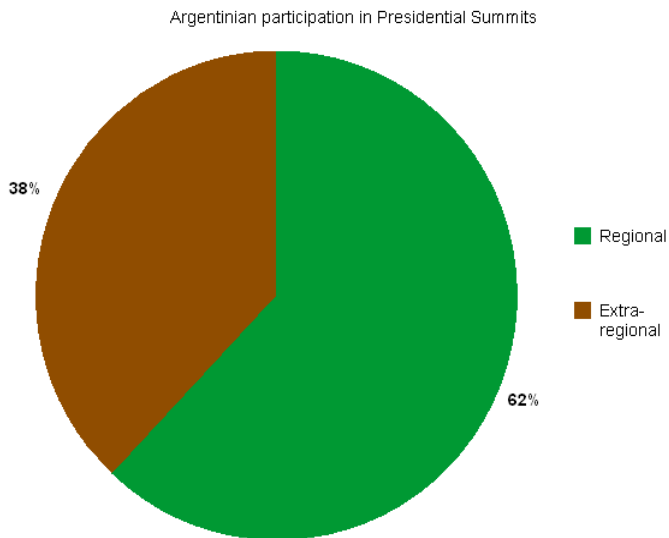
arising from 1990s accelerate political interaction between countries in similar circumstances, with similar political changes and a common characterisation of the West not more as promissory North in terms of alliances but as an inevitable big player, whose interests could often collide with those of the periphery. Even the creator of the peripheral realism, Carlos Escudé (2004: 16-27) admitted himself that “Systemic chaos has reduced the costs of confrontation with the hegemonic power. The equations of "peripheral realism" have changed”. In another book titled “The parasitic state” (2005) Escudé asserts that the global emergency seems to be interpreted by some of Latina American states as an adventure. Nevertheless, even when the availability of foreign capital dramatically declined .the international leeway looks much higher than in the 90s, when the world seemed restrained by a triumphant West.

During the first decade of the century, the crisis in traditional centres of power coupled with the increasingly significant economic magnificence of China and Asian countries that greatly elated regional gross domestic product (GDP) through their demand of goods and commodities. These facts helped to transform the international board in a way that foreign policy in the South of the region gradually became Latino-Americanised. Re-taking a recent input elaborated by Tokatlian:

“A common thread joins whole Latin America today: the revaluation of the State and the reorganization of society, pointing to moderate and discipline the market power. In this sense, there is an enhancement of state, a renewed interest in nation, watchfulness for the social issue and a greater sensitivity for development. This is, in turn, intertwined with the foreign policy of the government: for all countries, regardless of each ideological orientation, the key is to expand strategic options, which implies increasing autonomic capacity” (Tokatlian, 2011a: 259-260).

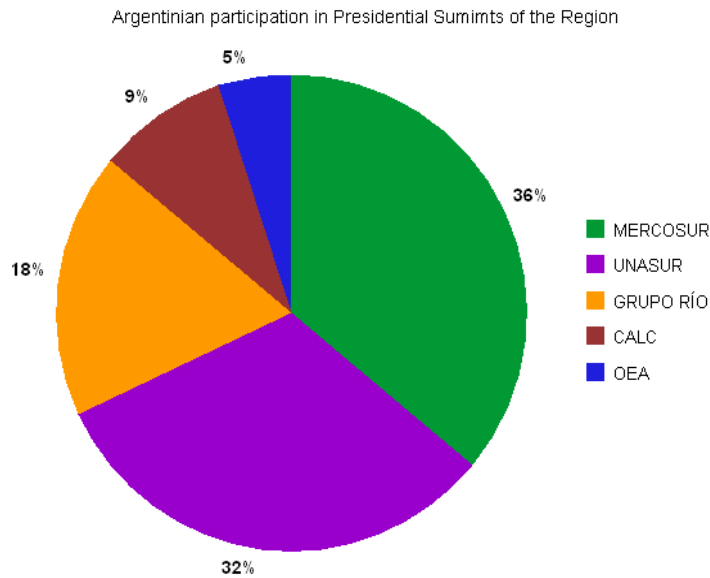
Besides, the political agenda is the heart of the ideology of regionalisation. Following that logic also showed in the following charts, Argentina has been giving an increasingly rising role to the region as part of international alliances. The assumption of Nestor Kirchner as

General Secretary of UNASUR¹⁸ (for a brief period in the home of his early death) shows the growing determination of Argentina's foreign policy to give hierarchy to the regional space. In addition, the active intervention of Argentina in Mercosur also continued providing space for political debates around common interests that lead to cooperation between Latin-American partners.



Source: Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Argentina.

¹⁸ The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is regional body aimed at boosting economic and political integration in the region. It includes twelve countries and its Constitutive Treaty was signed on 23 May 2008 during the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Brasília, Brazil (Reference needed).



Source: Own elaboration from documents gathered in the Treaties Direction, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Argentina.

In the succession of speeches of Presidents and their Chancellors during this period, it is also important to underline the importance given to the unity and the enlarging and strengthening of regional integration as a way to develop every national foreign policy as regards the whole world, improving the regional way of life, economic standards, and common abilities to deal with crisis. As a sample of this evolution, we can observe some of those speeches. In 2003, Nestor Kirchner claimed that “our regional integration must help us to enhance our voices in the world, to give more weight in multilateral decisions, serving our interests in favour of sustainable development of our economies, achievement of social equity in our countries and a fairer distribution of income”, while his Chancellor, Rafael Bielsa maintained the need of having a “truly united Latin America and not fragmented it, to negotiate and discuss friendly with developed countries, without forgetting our unit behind some transcendent values with which we are not neutral” (Bielsa, 2003).

In 2005, that unification concept became stronger. In the words of the President Kirchner: “I believe that Latin American and South American countries, both the Andean Community and Mercosur, are in a historical turning point, where we can show whether we are capable

to lay the groundwork for the construction of those spaces our regions require” (Kirchner, 2005).

According to these statements Chancellor Bielsa sustained:

“That is why our commitment to regional integration should be understood as a strategic option to strengthen the insertion of our countries in the world and achieve higher levels of agreement with the more developed blocks and states (...) Regional problems require cooperative and co-responsible solutions.” (Bielsa, 2005).

In 2008, President Cristina Fernández continues with this corpus of ideas asserting:

“I believe that we are moving from a purely declaratory and gesture diplomacy to a relationship and diplomacy of building and facts, which is what we need here in Latin America. But I also think that this reveals a turning point, because we are doing it between Latin American and for Latin American. What does not mean, in any way, to deny the world, but rather to better integrate and recognize ourselves in our own abilities, our own skills” (Fernández de Kirchner 2008).

Moreover, her Chancellor, Jorge Taiana ratified that: “we do not forget that Argentina grows and projects from its region, Latin America. Latin America requires increasingly attention and professional efforts of our diplomacy” (Taiana 2008).

Finally, after 2010, the President Fernández confirmed Argentinian willingness to:

“reaffirm this road we have taken and from where we should not be returning: the building of a South America, a UNASUR, a Latin America which engage us in a project of growth, development and an inflexible battle against inequity and inequality. That is not to deny the world, or the globalisation, but simply to look the world from here, from our own home, with our own recipes, with

our own projects, with our own programs. And conceive ourselves only in unity, even when we are angry” (Fernández de Kirchner 2010).

And her new chancellor, Hector Timerman, ratified that “we live in the Latin-American integration era, what represents the axis of our foreign policy and hold us as one of its key supporters. We have the honour of setting and ingraining those thoughts that throughout our history have collided once and again with entrenched interests” (Timerman, 2011).

From this sequence of assertions it can be observed how, regional forums are a primary platform for the regionalist ideology that has functioned as a legitimisation basis to endorse principles held to be necessary for an international insertion of the country. From this point, Argentinian diplomacy has shown the need to uphold multilateralism and to blindly respect the international law in the treatment of the international agenda. This meant an institutional legitimisation of prevailing international organizations bodies and agencies, in those areas exposed as central. They were: the defence of democracy and human rights, the fight against international terrorism, the respect for sovereignty and self-determination (with both national and regional autonomy) and peace maintenance.

The concept of "international terrorism", that has already been internalised, is consistent with the meaning proposed by international agencies and institutions. Although Cristina Fernández said in her inauguration speech that "the struggle in which we are committed against terrorism should not lead us to justify that for the fear to global terrorism we incur in global violation of human rights" (Fernández de Kirchner, 2007). There has been no re-conceptualisation of this issue. This fact has caused some momentary differences with other regional leaders and some domestic criticism, especially after the promotion of anti-terrorism law, which many social movements, even those supporters of the ruling party, consider the criminalisation of social protest and of popular organisation. However, this legitimization of institutional spaces of the international system is complemented with an insistent demand of democratisation of multilateral forums, the U.N. and the American States Organisation, and also the reform of the Security Council and an open criticism of the methodology and functioning of multilateral credit agencies. This conceptual body considers that the building of a centre of power to interact with others in the international arena is fair. Following this

discourse it is possible to sustain that multilateralism is the cornerstone of justice, and justice is in the basis of foreign relations.

This intentional strategy is supported by regionalism ideology. In line with what we have observed, recent research by Carlos Escudé found that Argentina choices in the last ten years for:

“(First of all) consolidate its alliance with its South American neighbours, (secondly) increase the extent of its cooperation with the Security Council United Nations on world peace and nuclear non-proliferation and combating terrorism crucial issues, and (thirdly) betting unilateral disarmament, to channel more resources towards progressive social policies, and thus alleviate the economic and social catastrophe caused by the neoliberalism of the previous decade. Although the third of these elements has been imposed by the circumstances of the crisis, this three-dimensional architecture formed an intentional strategy. It is no coincidence that disarmament is accompanied by the consolidation of alliances’ (2010: 16-17).

In relation to the world autonomy, a concept discussed at length by Argentinean academics¹⁹, we must say that it is not a notion that has been explicitly mentioned in the analysed documents, except during the period in which the government was working on the financial negotiations with credit agencies²⁰. In this case, political autonomy was stated several times

¹⁹For this notion Argentinian academy has got a classical reference such as heterodox autonomy, embraced by Peronist doctrine, which was described by Juan Carlos Puig (1984), and a recent incorporation: the relational autonomy, suggested by Roberto Russell and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian (2002). Following this path, Rapoport and Madrid considers that ‘after many years of having emptied the concepts of autonomy and non-intervention, it again raises the need for a new legality in order to replenish some of the fundamental principles associated directly with the peripheral countries problems, such as independence, sovereignty and also national/regional self-determination. The assertion of the expression and participation spaces of the countries of the region requires a joint strategy, that must start from the national specificity but be consistent with the common needs of the neighbors (...) the basis must be some different power relations, based on their own rights of each, and of the whole: we would call it "regional autonomy" and implies that negotiations with the hegemonic powers would not be taken forward by isolated nations but a block or set of them’ (Rapoport and Madrid, 2011).

²⁰On 15 December 2005 President Kirchner announced his intention of liquidating all the remaining debt to the International Monetary Fund, in a single payment of \$9.8 billions, initially planned to take place before the end of the year. Argentina made some minor payments beforehand, but the main one, for about \$9.5billions, was delayed for accounting reasons and paperwork, and it was finally made on 3 January 2006. Part of the debt was bought by Venezuela. From 2005 to 2006, Venezuela had already bought more than \$3 billion bonds from Argentina, issued by the Argentine government following the debt restructured. In total, Venezuela bought

to refer to the capacity of creating public policy decisions without interference or dependence, standing off recommendations that international credit organizations gave Argentina during the 1990s.

In contrast, notions of fairness, balance and sovereign equality among countries have been highly referred during the whole analysed period, both regarding to the treatment between countries as to the relationship between agencies or international organizations and countries. The allusion to material sovereignty is also constantly present in what concerns the Argentine claim for the Islas Malvinas²¹ and Southern Sandwich. According to the regionalisation ideology, the regional union allows the possibility of symmetry in Argentinian international relationships and strengthening its own national demands.

There were some essential circumstances in the region that reaffirm Argentinian interest and active diplomacy to keep the mentioned principles. Those cases are: the conflict between Ecuador and Colombia (March 2008), the political crisis in Bolivia (September 2008), the regional conflict due to the Colombian intention to increase the number of military bases in that country (August 2009), the coup attempt in Ecuador (September 2010) and the political crisis between Venezuela and Colombia (July 2010). In every one of these situations Argentina developed a political and diplomatic action, through its President, Chancellor and, in the case of the latter conflict, the former president and General Secretary of UNASUR. It was argued the need of dialogue and negotiations in regional and bilateral meetings, in order to reach a consensus agreement and prevent other course of actions, favouring the notion of *a region of peace*. In every case considered, the promotion of solutions to regional conflicts was a priority for Argentina's foreign policy agenda, with a successful outcome in all of them, in terms of having achieved the maintenance of democracy and peace.

Notwithstanding, it becomes necessary to mention some cases developed in the opposite direction. There are two cases that, even when they reaffirm the Argentinean ideological commitment to regional unity, are certainly contradictory with some of the mentioned principles sustained by it. The first one is the case of MINUSTAH troops operating in Haiti

more than \$5 billion bonds from Argentina since 2005. This is the main fact taken by Francisco Corigliano to argue that Argentinian and Venezuela have developed preference relationships (Corigliano, 2008)

²¹ Also known as Falkland Islands.

by the U.N. mandate, which includes Argentinian deployment.²² The political decision of Argentina has been to defend the presence of Argentine peacekeepers in Haiti's land (situation also shared by Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and even Bolivia), despite repeated complaints from many local organisations because of abuses perpetuated by military forces and their repeated claim for not militarising humanitarian aid. The second case concerns democracy maintenance, and it is the final recognition of a new government in Honduras, when the previous and democratic one had not yet finished its term and was deposed by force on 28 June 2008. In this case, although many governments in the region –including Argentina- played an important role in the visibility of the problem and in Juan Manuel Zelaya contention during and after the coup, the undemocratic maneuverer was successful. Both in Haiti and Honduras cases, the lack of a regional protocol in case of political and humanitarian crisis (Tokatlian, 2005; 2009; 2011b), generated in the region incapacity to create actions under sustained principles, and transforming them in cases that included deaths and a consummated democracy rape.

Conclusions

We could find a common thread in the expressions of key government actors of international relations (Presidents and their Foreign Ministers) and treaties signed in the analysed key years: 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2010. It is a conceptualization of regional unity as the first objective of Argentinean foreign policy, which composed what we have called the ideology of regionalism.

²² On 29 February 2004, a Franco-American military intervention ousted Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Subsequently, this coup was succeeded-and legitimated-by a "peace mission", in the presence of military troops that make up the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH in Spanish), with troops from different countries including Latin American (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay), led and funded by the U.S. and France. On 12 January 2010, when an earthquake hit Haiti MINUSTAH was positioned as a foreign force which could give the needed support to the country, changing its primary objective and leaving uncertain the time of completion of the mission, that still continues. In words of Juan Gabriel Tokatlian: "then, the urge to "do something" for Haiti led to several Latin American countries to take a misconceived diplomatic and military intervention; poorly implemented and devoid of political, rigorous and measurable purposes. Before nature hit hard, deployed military intervention in Haiti after 2004 had failed in terms of pacifying the country, stabilising the political situation, reconciling society and bringing some improvement in Haitians' quality of life "(2011a).

From this ideology, the international crisis, the global context, and similar political circumstances between neighbours, have all allowed Argentina to fall back on the region for international expansion. The world region usually refers to Mercosur for the infrastructure and trade agenda. For the development of political issues, the world region often covers South America and Latin America, through its institutional conglomerations; Rio Group, UNASUR and CALC/CELAC. Through them, policy is considered the central element of the concept of regional integration, which means that integration is mainly a political union.

With regard to bilateral relations, Argentina has strengthened the link with Venezuela, Brazil and Chile (A-B-V-C axis), as a combination of ideological proximity and the material gravity of these countries in the region. The relationship with these three countries has been specially –but not only- focused in energetic integration issues and was inclusive in the sense that each agenda radiate toward the others and to regional areas. Regional forums have been useful to consolidate principles that Argentina holds for its own ideological international construction: multilateralism with egalitarianism, balanced and equal sovereignty, respect for international law and institutions, fight against international terrorism and the defence of democracy, human rights and disarmed peace. Fairness, symmetry and, in some cases, political autonomy (particularly mentioned in relation to financial negotiations) are also material axes that constituted the regionalism ideology.

This historically organic ideology organises and gives identity to the many actors that promote regionalism. The definition of these principles is not definitive but provides a framework for foreign policy decisions and their implementation. The material dynamic interacts with the ideological one and deserves a specific study, focusing on the implementation of institutional changes and trade flows within the region.

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