



Membership, Enlargement and Identity in Mercosur: Opening the Black Box of Norm Development

Abstract of Phd Project

The dissertation project analyzes the interplay of membership, identity and norm development in the Common Market of the South (Mercosur). The aim is to analyze how membership influences a Regional Organization's (RO) identity and its expression in fundamental political norms such as democracy, human rights and rule of law. It is assumed that identity-related issues become particularly salient when an "outsider" asks for admission to the community, thus confronting the RO with the necessity to take a stance towards the potential enlargement. This should not only lead to an assessment of the demanding state's compatibility and its capacity to become a community member, but also to reflection processes about the RO's own identity. For an RO receiving a membership demand constitutes a moment to (re)consider the values and norms it wants to embody as well as the future path of the organization. Similar identity-related reflection processes should take place in case an already established member of the RO acts against the community's values, thus questioning the RO's code of norms and values. These reflections about identity might well lead to an adaptation of the RO's body of norms in case a misfit is discovered between the prevailing situation and the way it should be.

In order to test these assumptions three case studies will be conducted. The first one focuses on Paraguay, paying special attention to the democratic crises the country suffered in 1996 that served as a "focusing event" directing attention to the lack of democratic conditionality in Mercosur and ultimately resulted in the establishment of a democratic clause (Protocol of Ushuaia). Furthermore, the events surrounding Paraguay's suspension in 2012 will be analyzed. The second case study deals with Venezuela's protracted accession process, the intense discussions it triggered, especially in the Paraguayan and Brazilian legislative power, and their implications for Mercosur's identity. Finally, the ongoing Bolivian accession process will be studied.

For this purpose, the demand for norm change, the actors advocating it and the scope conditions for successful norm change are studied in detail. The research applies a within case analysis that traces the process of norm development and assesses its influence on the political identity of the RO. An important source of information will be interviews that are to be conducted with official representatives and high-ranking administrative staff of Mercosur and its member states as well as other participants in the norm debates in order to shed light on the decision-making processes.