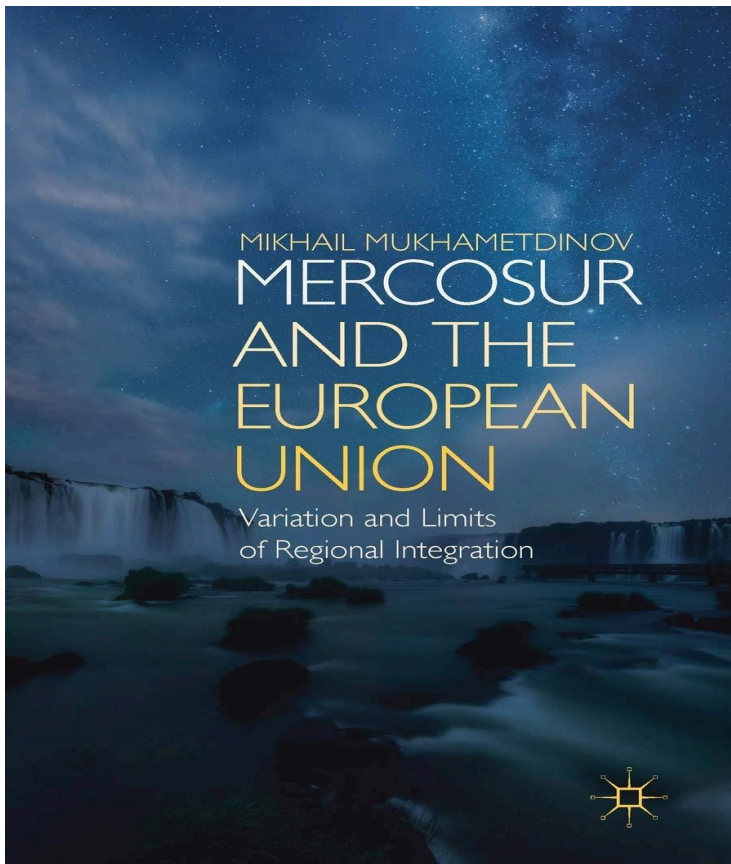


MERCOSUR AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: VARIATION AND LIMITS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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The author is Mikhail Mukhametdinov, an adjunct Spanish and Portuguese professor at the Samara College for the Humanities. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy from the University of Sydney and a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from Tufts University. He is a former Visiting Scholar at Harvard and Stanford Universities.

Mikhail Mukhametdinov's book is written for internationalists, lawyers, politicians, and *regionalism* researchers. It brings a strict comparison between

MERCOSUR and the European Union as common markets and, most of all, as regional economic blocs; the author highlights both structures using the *analytic eclecticism* theory in a multidimensional process, which means interacting with several International Relations parameters at the same time, given the complexity of explaining the comparison issues.

The author intends to put the EU as a model for the MERCOSUR as the regional common market itself. In this book, he indicates that MERCOSUR keeps almost every EU's equivalent institution in its framework, although of minor acting importance. Still, at the same time, Mukhametdinov reveals the two blocs' different motivations for interacting with other countries/regions. In addition, he demonstrates the meaning of integration for regional blocs'

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purposes, indicating the economic disparities among MERCOSUR's member states as an overwhelming obstacle to reliable supranational institutional formation.

Comparing MERCOSUR to the European Union (EU), Mikhail Mukhametdinov seeks to understand how the South American common market remains a significant international player in the subcontinent. Given the asymmetric countries' development in economic (economic interdependence), politico-institutional (state size and interest asymmetries), historic-cultural (cultural diversity), and geostrategic issues (geostrategic motivations), the author asserts that regionalism is under discussion but still firm. However, he also delimited the differences between the EU and MERCOSUR regarding economic and social joint achievements, pointing out the lack of enforcement of MERCOSUR's rules as a strategic failure.

In his book, Mikhail addresses that the MERCOSUR will keep its framework away from the EU structures, which could be used in comparison studies with other world regions. Going through coordination, cooperation, and integration definitions, the author demonstrates the values of these concepts, mainly when it comes to regional common markets' intentions in harmonizing national policies and enforcing them.

Besides that, the author emphasizes the differences between the regional blocs, which must be analyzed from historical and cultural perspectives. Comparing the member states, Mikhail Mukhametdinov shows the disparities regarding their past formation: while in the MERCOSUR, the member states are former European colonies, in the EU, the majority is composed of rich countries with high technological resources at their reach.

The author also discusses the renitent problems faced by the MERCOSUR member states regarding their economic relations with other wealthy countries. This is vital for understanding recent Brazil's opposition to the Uruguay/China bilateral proposed agreement. Given the lack of solid commercial links among MERCOSUR member states and weak transnational trade influxes, some are trying to improve their economic relations out of the bloc agreement. These practices are melting even more the integrational will among the member states, one of Mikhail Mukhametdinov's reasons for MERCOSUR's unsuccessful as a supranational institution.

The book demonstrates the author's right perception in indicating the real integrational issues in the MERCOSUR, comparing them to the European Union level in its structures and institutions. Nonetheless, Mikhail Mukhametdinov's most central goal is the finding through which he indicates the lack of integration among MERCOSUR members, mainly on forming a solid supranational institutionalized regional bloc. The idea of *supranationalism* here is **Revista Espirales, Foz do Iguaçu, UNILA, ISSN 2594-9721 (eletrônico), v. 8, n. 1, 2024, p. 406-409**

posed as an evolution of *intergovernmental* MERCOSUR measures. However, Mukhametdinov points out that the insufficient advances in MERCOSUR politics for real integration are the reason for the lack of supranationalism common sense spread among the member states.

The core of the discussion is based on International Relations theories. Therefore, the most important author's strength argument is the idea of integrating nations based on satisfying material needs (Neo-Functionalism and Liberal Intergovernmentalism). According to the author, this is the key to MERCOSUR's problem regarding economic integration; it is more complex than a simple customs harmonization. The book also brings the MERCOSUR's missed integrational chances when its member states' similarities are not taken as advantages. In this way, Mikhail points out the cultural proximities, the languages integration, the shared past colonial history, from one side, and the will for expanded political power, economic competitiveness, and negotiation capacity relative to the rest of the world and against the international hegemony in particular, from another, as missed opportunities for MERCOSUR more robust institutional integration (Social-Constructivism and Neorealism).

Interestingly, the author is a researcher in Portuguese and Spanish, the two spoken languages in MERCOSUR. Therefore, his view about the region is based on international academic impressions from outside the two common markets, which enriches the debate over the research problem. Proving this, the book brings comprehensive research about MERCOSUR's *geo-economic strategy* of developing and increasing the economic leverage of integrating its member states against extra-regional actors. Nonetheless, the author emphasizes the predominance of *MERCOSUR de facto* over *MERCOSUR de jure*. That impressive analysis can contribute to understanding the nature of the South American common market conception and evolution.

After defining an analytical framework in the first part, the book assessed the intra-economic interdependence among the member states better to scrutinize the EU and MERCOSUR disparities in commercial exchanges. The author points out these issues as MERCOSUR's failures, addressing that it is not a real common market; at most, MERCOSUR represents an effort to a customs union agreement. Moreover, the book enumerates the institutional economic gaps in goods, services, capital, and labor markets, which can be associated with geographical, physical, demographical, and structural characteristics for increasing MERCOSUR options and chances for real integration. In this point, Mukhametdinov establishes the normative inconsistency and the internalization gap as real villains of MERCOSUR's economic integration. This part concludes by indicating the *Revista Espirales*, Foz do Iguaçu, UNILA, ISSN 2594-9721 (eletrônico), v. 8, n. 1, 2024, p. 406-409

minor relevance of the common market willingness to the member states and the greater importance of domestic markets and extra-regional economic relations to them.

The book content is updated considering the discussion on a unitary currency in the MERCOSUR market. The author brings up the advantages and disadvantages of this, which can contribute to maturing the debate on this topic. However, regarding the Argentinian inflation rates, Mukhametdinov needs the latest data from the economic stabilization process in that country.

In conclusion, the author indicates that, beyond the trade in goods, in services, the movement of capital and workers, and the right of establishment, which the European Union demonstrated in good shape, the MERCOSUR have yet to reach the trade of goods at the minimum level. This particular issue is yet to be harmonized partially by each member state. Mukhametdinov states, “[...] the imitation has to be original, and no elements of the European model may be transferred to MERCOSUR blindly”. So, South Americans should trace their track on the integration model to be followed.

The author delimitates the structural factors influencing MERCOSUR and the EU regional integration. The book encloses intergovernmentalism as essential for political integration into common markets (mainly in intra-market relations). Nevertheless, in MERCOSUR, the power influences come from economic interests, which means that the integration rate could be evaluated through the most influential financial groups when they put pressure on the governments in each member state.

The book is well-constructed and in excellent and accessible language, which makes the reading pleasant. Its content is based on the latest discussions about MERCOSUR, valued as the eventual free trade agreement with the European Union is on the stage again.

References

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