

*The MERCOSUR Committee of Municipalities, States,
Provinces and Departments.
Process of creation and perspectives*

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*Paper prepared for the Fifth Annual Conference of the Euro-Latin Study Network on
Integration and Trade (ELSNIT), Barcelona, Spain, October, 26-27, 2007*

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1. Introduction

The MERCOSUR integration process institutionally incorporated the subnational dimension. The MERCOSUR Committee of Municipalities, Federative States, Provinces and Departments (hereinafter called COMMITTEE) was officially installed on 18 January 2007 at the MERCOSUR Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, inaugurating a new phase in expansion of the MERCOSUR structure that constitutes a milestone for democratization of the integration process in South America with significant consequences to the development of the governmental dynamics of the block's member countries.

The purpose of this paper is to present, analyze, and discuss creation of the COMMITTEE and its perspectives, based on a Brazilian viewpoint. To this end, the text is divided into three parts. The first refers to the forerunners of decentralized international cooperation and paradiplomacy within the integration process, which harks back to the previous phase of the MERCOSUR in the 1980s, advances into the 1990s, and is consolidated in the 2000s. The second deals with the political process that gave rise to the creation and installation of the COMMITTEE and its decisive players. The third focuses the dynamics established as of creation of the COMMITTEE, its agenda, and its perspectives within the broader MERCOSUR scenario.

Given their different professional affiliations and different views on the MERCOSUR integration process, the authors sought to lend an academic-governmental viewpoint to the text. It is important to register that the text does not reflect the official position of any agency of the Brazilian government or of the MERCOSUR.

2. About the Terminology Used in this Paper

The international relations adopted by subnational (or non-central) governments receive varied and heterogeneous nomenclature in literature on the theme, depending on the analyst's affiliation and the country's

governmental culture. In Brazil – as in most countries (Aldecoa; Keating, 2000) – the term paradiplomacy has been in use since the 1990s to cover a wide range of international actions of state and municipal governments supported by and in compliance with international cooperation and integration agreements, or developed *motu proprio*, as true federative foreign policy (Rodrigues, 2004).

As regards the government, Brazilian authorities officially use two different types of terminology: federative diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Relations), and federative international cooperation (Secretariat for Federative Affairs of the Secretariat for Institutional Relations of the Presidency of the Republic). The latter has been more widely applied to participation of Brazilian states and cities within the realm of the COMMITTEE and to cooperation among regions and nation-states (especially with Italy and France).

The authors have no intention to resolve this terminological predicament, or to create debates about it, because they understand that differences of opinion and heterogeneous views are part and parcel of the wealth of debate focusing any new field of analysis in the political and social sciences. Thus, for the purposes of this paper on the COMMITTEE, they adopt the expression “federative international cooperation”, highlighting their aim to promote harmonious mutual understanding among the various levels of government within the integration process.

3. Forerunners of federative international cooperation and paradiplomacy in the MERCOSUR

The interest of Brazilian subnational governments in taking part in the process of integration in Brazil harks back to the creation of the Latin American Free Trade Association – LAFTA (*Associação Latino-Americana de Livre-Comércio - ALALC*), in 1960. On that occasion, then governor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (southern Brazil), Leonel de Moura Brizola, declared that that agreement (Montevideo Treaty – 18/2/1960) would endanger the federate state, and thus

claimed the state government's right to "examine and make itself heard during the drawing up of the Montevideo Treaty". This claim was made by Brizola in a telegram dated Feb/02/1960, and sent to then President of the Republic, Juscelino Kubitschek (Seitenfus, 1994; Rodrigues, 2004). Brizola, a visionary, at that time was already demanding observance of the principles of cooperative and participative federalism in the country's international relations.

Nevertheless, despite Brizola's demands, there is no evidence that any subnational governments of the nation-state members of LAFTA ever achieved official participation in negotiations carried out during the existence of that organization (1960-1980). The same can be said of the Latin American Integration Association – LAIA (*Associação Latino-Americana de Integração – ALADI*) – Montevideo Treaty, Aug/12/1980. Naturally, the authoritarian wave that washed through Latin America and the Caribbean as of the 1960s within the context of the Cold War inhibited subnational autonomy and decentralization within the process of regional integration. It should be kept in mind that the Treaty that led to the constitution of LAIA, in Chapter 1, Article 3, Item "a" established pluralism as one of its principles, as follows: "Pluralism, sustained by the will of member countries to integrate themselves, over and above the diversity which might exist in political and economic matters in the region"³. This mechanism made it possible for democratic and authoritarian governments within the block to coexist.

Redemocratization of South American governments in the 1980s, above all of Argentina and Brazil, engendered a fertile process featuring dialogue between the subnational political classes of the two countries. Unlike Argentina, where the return to democracy was abrupt, with the military relinquishing power following defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982 and the direct election of President Raúl Alfonsín (1983), in Brazil, the so-called "transition to democracy" followed the prescription established by General Golbery do Couto

³ Montevideo Treaty (1980), Montevideo: LAIA, 1980.

e Silva – Chief of Staff during the administration of President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979), – a “slow, gradual, and safe” changeover (Gaspari, 2003). That transition, legally foreseen, established that direct elections would be held first in the federate states – those elections took place in 1982. The democratically elected state governors, such as Leonel Brizola, in Rio de Janeiro, and André Franco Montoro, in São Paulo, inaugurated Brazilian democratic transition paradiplomacy: Brizola created the first federate state office of foreign relations (headed by political scientist Clóvis Brigagão, peace and security specialist), and established his own international agenda (Rodrigues, 2004; Brigagão, 2005). Montoro promoted the ideology of Latin-American integration that ultimately resulted in the installation of PARLATINO (the Latin-American Parliament) in São Paulo (Montoro, 1999).

Argentina-Brazil bilateral relations sought to overcome the tension generated by the Itaipu-Corpus dispute in the field of energy geopolitics by means of a process aimed to ease tension by means of which the frontiers of confrontation would give place to live frontiers featuring cooperation (Coelho, 1992).

Using Argentina’s redemocratization as a benchmark, governors of the Brazilian federate states, especially those of the South and Southeast, set up direct dialogue with the central and provincial Argentine authorities, generating a new fact, almost provocative in the eyes of the military government of President João Batista Figueiredo (1979-1985), although this fact was not seen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) as a threat or deviation, but rather as an element capable of actually easing the country’s return to democracy (Guerreiro, 2004 apud Rodrigues, 2004).

The process of Argentine-Brazilian integration gained added status with José Sarney’s rise to the presidency (1985-1990). This new status was materialized in the Iguaçu Declaration of Jan/30/1985, held to be the cornerstone of integration between the two countries.

In the meantime, the Brazilian states of Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul joint members of the CODESUL/FORUM Sul, and the Argentine provinces of Corrientes, Chaco, Entre Rios, Formosa, Misiones, and Santa Fé, united in the Regional Foreign Trade Commission of NEA Litoral – CRECE-NEA Litoral, established an ongoing trans-federative dialogue focusing common regional interests.

Within this context, the state of Rio Grande do Sul (that same state that had claimed its right to a voice in LAFTA negotiations), led by then recently elected Governor Pedro Simon (1987-1990), created the Special Secretariat for International Affairs, the first of its kind in any Brazilian federate state, headed by Professor Ricardo Seitenfus, a international relations specialist, and began negotiating greater participation in the then incipient integration process. The result of these subnational maneuvers, which also included the Uruguayan government – with outstanding participation of then Chancellor Enrique Iglesias (Simon apud Rodrigues, 2004) – resulted in approval of *Border Protocol N. 23*, the first international document to include subnational border governments in the Southern Cone integration process. As foreseen in the Protocol, Border Committees were created, with a hybrid structure involving national and local authorities, opening up actual spaces for decentralized bilateral international cooperation. The Southern Cone border territory was consolidated as a pilot-space for the first institutional acts of subnational international cooperation.

Within the domestic domain of each country, the redemocratization process was being accompanied by decentralizing measures – measures aimed to reinstate autonomy and competencies. Brazil celebrated the election of a National Constitutional Congress (1987-1988) that produced a new constitution, approved on Oct/05/1988. Despite this advance, the drive to decentralize power in response to the lengthy period of concentration of power during the dictatorial regime, was not accompanied by the creation of intergovernmental

instruments capable of promoting federative dialogue, above all dialogue featuring themes of common or joint competence (education, environment, health, and transport, among others).

The Asuncion Treaty of March/26/1991 created a “technical” MERCOSUR, based on the concept of Argentine and Brazilian chancelleries, concerned about generating and ensuring a space for inserting the four countries in the post-Cold War international scenario. Space was not made for participation outside of the national-governmental realm. The two pillars of the MERCOSUR – political democratization and economic liberalization (Florêncio, 1996) – prioritized these two trends in the central foreign policy agendas of Argentina and Brazil, i.e., the MERCOSUR was born as a democratic process, but not as a participative democratic process. The Ouro Preto Protocol (1994), which lent the block a legal international personality, created institutional entities such as the Economic and Social COMMITTEE. However, the working of these entities remained limited to a small group of players.

In the 1990s, ever broader spaces opened up for the international relations of subnational governments. Creation of the Committee of the Regions in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), stemming from recognition of the strength of the EUROCITIES Network, is undoubtedly a milestone for recognition of the legitimacy of subnational governments in European politics – democratization via regionalism (Stuart, 2002) – a fact that was to influence the local-power movements in Latin America. The constitutional reform in Argentina (1994), which introduced the “paradiplomacy clause” in article 124 of the Argentine constitution, became a legal corollary of international relations of the Argentine provinces (Iglesias, 2007). And creation of the MERCOCITIES Network (1995) signaled structural changes in domestic and international policy of the MERCOSUR integration process.

In Brazil, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s administration dealt with adjusting to this new reality and created the Federative Relations Advisory

Board (*Assessoria de Relações Federativas* - ARF) – subordinate to the Minister of Foreign Relations (1997) – an entity that came to play the role of interface between the chancellery and the international demands of Brazilian states and municipalities. The administration of President Lula altered the ARF, transforming it into the Special Advisory Board for Federative and Parliamentary Affairs (*Assessoria Especial de Assuntos Federativos e Parlamentares* – AFEPA). However, the most relevant fact was the creation of the Secretariat for Federative Affairs (*Subchefia de Assuntos Federativos* – SAF), linked to the Presidential Office (2003).

During President Lula's first term in office (2003-2006), the SAF came to be active in the federative international cooperation theme as part of a broader policy aimed to redefine the federative pact (denominated "federative repactuation"). This new activity, coordinated with the Itamaraty, resulted in joint SAF-Itamaraty formulation and management of the federative international cooperation theme.

4. MERCOSUR: a changed model and a new democratic institutionalality

Creation of the COMMITTEE, in 2004, and its implementation, in 2007, are part of a broader context in which the MERCOSUR had been featured in recent years. The election of leftist and center-left governments, as of the early 2000s in several South-American countries not only revitalized the block, but redeemed, with great force, debate regarding the model of hemispheric integration and the manner of insertion of the South-American continent in the context of advanced globalization.

As it was known up to that time, the MERCOSUR largely resembled the policies conducted by the countries of the block and reflected the view of its leaders, a view focused mainly on the gains stemming from trade exchanges,

based on market liberalization and the common external tariff (*Tarifa Externa Comum* - TEC), benefiting certain specific sectors of economic activity.

The free trade zone model already showed signs of fraying and of structural fragility in the 1990s when the trade disputes, marked by unilateral retaliations, became commonplace within the negative construction of the block's identity – having as its backdrop Brazil's financial turmoil (1999) and Argentina's major economic crisis (2001-2002).

Exhaustion of the predominantly commercial model indicated the limits of the manner of insertion of the region within the international context adopted by the member countries. The need for a more in-depth examination of the block's institutionalization became increasingly clear, at the risk of back-pedaling and destroying the broader process of regional integration.

One of the main criticisms directed to the MERCOSUR model adopted up to that time referred to the so-called “democratic deficit” (Carrillo Flórez, 2001). Actually, there was little or no participation of the other players or political forces in the block's decision-making process. However, as of the region's new political context, the newly elected leaders embraced the theme and made it a central issue in their political agenda. The opening up to broader democratic participation turned out to be the main challenge facing the block, and the presidents of the member countries embraced the cause as their priority commitment, with repercussions on all government levels.

Three facts reveal the institutional advance and the materialization of these commitments: creation of the MERCOSUR Parliament, in December 2006; incorporation of the Social Summits in the block's political process, thereby incorporating the civil society; and the inauguration of the MERCOSUR Committee of Municipalities, States, Provinces and Departments, in January 2007.

5. The process of creation and implementation of the MERCOSUR Committee of Municipalities, States, Provinces and Departments

Political Origins of the creation of the COMMITTEE

Redemocratization of the countries of the block, constitutionalization of the decentralization of competencies, and global upgrading of the value of local power as a relevant player and a privileged *locus* for the formulation and execution of public policies constitutes one of the keys to understanding how creation of the COMMITTEE came about.

Municipalities, states, provinces, and departments governed by new leaders in tune with and committed to progressive platforms began to criticize and oppose the model adopted up to that time by the central governments in the construction and administration of MERCOSUR, with exclusive and excluding bias, following the general lines of the neoliberal economic policies adopted throughout the continent, including Argentina and Brazil.

Construction of the MERCOSUR, which was to effect profound changes in hemispheric geopolitics, and relations among the countries of the continent, became the object of lively debates with a view to increased opening to the other social players and subnational governments. The central discussion focused what was the most desirable model of regional integration for the region. And the local leaders not only wanted to take part in the theoretic debate, but to integrate it as players in the process. The next moment was the materialization of this demand agenda: creation of the MERCOCITIES Network (*Red MERCOCIUDADES*) which, in the beginning, included capital cities and cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants.

The role of MERCOCITIES was fundamental in this context. Its agenda was structured around three main axes: the first was to take the form of an institutional demand – direct participation in the formal structure of MERCOSUR, with the creation of a hierarchic level that would be linked directly to the

block's decision-making bodies. The political agenda was strongly marked by defense of a wide-ranging, democratic, inclusive, and participative MERCOSUR that would deal directly with the various social forces and subnational governments. As a form of direct action, taking into consideration that the dynamics of integration manifest themselves on various levels of society, MERCOCITIES developed international horizontal cooperation actions by means of Thematic Units, uniting local agreement powers with thematic affinity around diverse urban themes, such as local economic and social development, environmental issues, planning, culture, and others.

The coherency demonstrated by the MERCOCITIES Network in the course of years of work, political action and cooperation, plus growing pressure exerted on central governments to enhance and broaden their participation within the block, led the MERCOSUR Common Market Group (CMG) to create REMI (the Specialized Meeting for Municipalities and Local Governments⁴) in 2000. Although REMI formally integrated municipalities in the MERCOSUR institutional structure, it proved insufficient in its object of catering to the demands and proposals of local governments. Linked as it was to the Political Concerting and Consultation Committee, an intermediary agency of the Common Market Group (CMG), it began to fulfill a bureaucratic and formalist function, instead of effectively making the urban agenda an integral part of MERCOSUR.

Creation of REMI revealed the Nation States' difficulty in understanding the role of the subnational governments and their potential to strengthen and spread integration actions within the territory. The local powers were seen as a "theme" to be dealt with, and not as "partners" for joint actions.

In the course of its fleeting existence, REMI faced difficulties in effectively inserting local governments in the decision-making levels of the MERCOSUR, a fact that rekindled the drive to create another formal space for local

⁴ CMG Resolution n°. 90/00.

governments in the MERCOSUR, a space linked directly to the CMG or to the CMC, the block's main decision-making agencies.

Thus, new negotiations took place, negotiations that aimed to convert REMI into a formal structure with an effective voice in the block's processes.

It is important to point out that it was the cities – articulated and united by the MERCOCITIES Network – that faced the debate on institutional reform promised for the Ouro Preto Summit of 2004 marking the tenth anniversary of the Ouro Preto Protocol, and in the course of which the COMMITTEE was finally created.

It was a concise text – Decision 41/04⁵ of the Common Market Council (CMC), the highest decision-making body of MERCOSUR – that created the MERCOSUR Committee of Municipalities, States, Provinces and Departments (*Foro Consultivo de Municípios, Estados, Províncias e Departamentos do MERCOSUL*). In its comments and its six articles, the text states *“the convenience of instituting a committee that encourages dialogue and the cooperation of authorities at the local, state, provincial, and departmental levels of the member countries of the MERCOSUR, with one another and with the National Governments”*.

Decision 41/04 clearly defines the COMMITTEE's place and its competencies within the MERCOSUR, competencies that include *“proposing measures aimed toward coordination of policies to promote the well-being and improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of Municipalities, States, Provinces and Departments of the region, as well as formulating recommendations through the Common Market Group”* (article 4).

However, it is articles 2 and 3 that set forth significant changes in regard to the workings of the COMMITTEE. Article 2 establishes that the COMMITTEE shall succeed REMI. Article 3 establishes a working structure comprising two permanent branches: one of Municipalities, and the other of States, Provinces,

⁵ See the unabridged text of Decision 41/04 at www.mercosul.int/

and Departments. These two articles constitute the synthesis of the debate that preceded creation of the COMMITTEE, which counterposed two distinct theses.

Led by MERCOCITIES, the local governments defended the creation of a COMMITTEE that would represent only the cities, without including regional governments. This thesis was based on the fact that, up to then, only the local governments had had any voice in debate related to the creation of an institutional space for the subnational governments within the MERCOSUR structure. In this same mindset, it was feared that the agenda of regional governments, above all those of the Brazilian States and Argentine Provinces, strongly marked by themes addressing their competencies, such as infrastructure, economic development, attracting investments, energy, and university cooperation, would override the agenda of the cities, relegating them to a secondary level.

On the other hand, the national governments, especially those of Brazil and Argentina, understood that this new level should be represented by the body of territorial governments in order to express the political force of the States and Provinces.

These governmental levels have been upholding an extensive agenda of activities in the process of Latin American and MERCOSUR integration, although such initiatives only communicate in an isolated, sporadic, and opportune manner with the Nation States. This was another source of misgiving for the cities which, organized in a network and having attained a high level of "supranationality", foresaw a reduction in the rhythm of COMMITTEE activities as a whole due to the regional governments' lack of experience in acting on levels of collective agreement.

The solution that was negotiated resulted in the working structure of the COMMITTEE comprising two committees with a view to ensuring the autonomy of the municipalities, the diversity of agendas, and difference in the rhythm of action.

Finally, throughout the text of Decision 41/04, one notes the concern in regard to establishing, as clearly as possible, the COMMITTEE's link to the CMG. Its recommendations, its House Rules, and its public declarations, as well as possible contacts with other levels of the MERCOSUR and international organizations, defined in the House Rules, must be submitted to the CMG and approved by means of CMG intermediation (See Chart 1, Attached).

Of the Creation and Implementation: second stage of the negotiation process

It took two years for the COMMITTEE to go into operation – from the Ouro Preto Summit in 2004 during Brazil's *pro tempore* presidency of the MERCOSUR, until the Rio de Janeiro summit in January 2007, with Brazil again leading the block. As of its implementation, the existence of a MERCOSUR entity uniting governors of Brazil and Argentina and mayors of all the countries of the region began to be analyzed with greater caution by the member-country chancelleries. At the same time, the new national governments elected began to remove their political platform from the field of ideas and, slowly and jointly, to implement their projects for regional integration and strengthening of the MERCOSUR.

However, this task proved to be more complex and slower than expected. Speeches by the presidents of the member countries, about a new era for the block, created great expectations in the regional players, but failed to take into account the very slow pace at which processes of integration tend to develop, due to their extreme complexity and to the plurality of players and interests.

There is an important aspect in the COMMITTEE's institutional dynamics that differentiates it from the overall dynamics of the MERCOSUR, already consolidated in the structures of the chancelleries of member countries. Management of the political, institutional and administrative process is the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the members. Regardless of

the ministerial structure in each country, the status of member – in the Venezuelan case, that of “*quasi member*” – obliges the public structures of the countries to have a CMG National Coordinator plus a substitute, usually a high-ranking diplomatic staff member, or even the Chancellor himself (Paraguayan case).

In the COMMITTEE, one notes that each country adopted its own solution as a means of bowing to domestic demands, solutions that reflect the diverse national realities (See Chart 2, Attached). In Brazil, the Secretariat for Federative Affairs, directly linked to the structure of the Presidential Office, was designated to take charge of National Coordination, attaching a high level of priority to the theme since federative relations – the construction of channels of permanent dialogue among the three spheres of the Federation, (Union, States, and Municipalities) – was granted special attention by the administration of President Lula, including its hemispheric and international dimension.

Argentina, in its turn, adopted a solution similar to the Brazilian, appointing the *Subsecretaria de Relaciones Institucionales* (Undersecretariat of Institutional Relations) of the *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to coordinate the theme. This entity has similarities with its Brazilian namesake since, although it is linked to the office of foreign policy, it also handles relations with Argentine subnational governments, among other duties. Paraguay also opted to delegate coordination of the COMMITTEE to its Ministry of Foreign Relations, which is in charge of appointing the subnational governments that make up the entity.

Another solution was adopted by Uruguay and Venezuela⁶. The two countries directly designated local or regional governing leaders as national coordinators. In the case of Uruguay, choice of the National Coordinator is in

⁶ Venezuela, according to formal Mercosur criteria, is an associate member of the block. It is currently in the phase of full membership, awaiting approval by the Brazilian and Paraguayan congresses. However, since its formal membership request was registered, it has, in practice, been participating as a full member in Mercosur entities, including the COMMITTEE.

the realm of the President of the Congress of *Intendentes*, a collegiate entity that comprises the country's local representatives (a total of 19). In the Venezuelan case, the National Coordinator is appointed directly by the President of the Republic, as is the case of the other representatives of that country in the COMMITTEE. At present, the person who occupies this position is the Mayor of the Metropolitan District of Caracas, an intermediary governmental level with the attributes of a State (Capital District).

Thus, in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, one notes the presence of the national governments in national command of the COMMITTEE; and in Uruguay and Venezuela, we see the direct incidence, via delegation, of the local governments. Both solutions have their pros and cons as regards directing of the work and involvement of the COMMITTEE members, and each is justified by the political dynamics of each country, by the greater or lesser importance lent to the theme by the entities linked to the MERCOSUR in the public structures, as well as by the level of decentralization and federative dialogue present in each Member Country⁷.

This institutional diversity brings wealth to the process and, at the same time, generates functional and methodological complications related to process content and conception. Local and national governments may work together on common agendas, but their view and objectives will depend on the amplitude of perception of the MERCOSUR process and of regional integration as a whole. Differences in rhythm, viewpoint, perception, and objectives can compromise the manner of directing the process in its current stage, which requires special care to ensure its institutional consolidation, legitimacy, and the role of the subnational governments.

⁷ See the complete list of country representatives to the COMMITTEE in the Charter 4, Attachments.

6. COMMITTEE dynamics, agenda, and perspectives

As of January 2007, date of the COMMITTEE Implementation Meeting, graced by the presence of President Lula, governors, and mayors of the main Southern Cone regions and cities, discussions and actions of the COMMITTEE have been focusing on three main axes. The first has to do with the institutional and working scope and is materialized in negotiations addressing the text of the House Rules, approved at the Plenary Session of the COMMITTEE in June 2007 in Asuncion, and ratified by the CMG in September 2007 in Montevideo.

On the same note, COMMITTEE debates and proposals point to the importance attached to inter-institutional relations with other MERCOSUR entities, especially those focusing social and political themes of the block, such as the MERCOSUR Parliament, the Commission of Permanent MERCOSUR Representatives, the Economic and Social COMMITTEE, the Political Concerting and Consultation COMMITTEE, and the “We Are Mercosur” Program, as established in the Rio Letter.⁸

In the realm of the COMMITTEE of Municipalities, States, Provinces and Departments, since the implementation meeting, reunions and/or gatherings were proposed with the purpose of bringing governors of the various Southern Cone regions closer together. The first of these took place in Tucumán Province, Argentina, in May 2007, bringing together eight of the nine governors of the Brazilian Northeast Region, and five of the six governors of the Northeast Region of Argentina (See Chart 3, Attachments).

These gatherings feature the need to establish closer relations among the governors in order to enhance mutual knowledge, to identify common interests with a view to establishing short-term cooperation agendas, the governability of which is in the hands of the governors and local players. To this end, the gatherings of political leaders are preceded by technical seminars in which

⁸ The unabridged text of the Rio Letter is available at www.presidencia.gov.br/sri/foro_consultivo/documentos.html.

employees, specialists, and high-ranking staff of the regional administrations debate previously selected thematic axes with potential for exchange. In Tucumán, the Cooperation Agenda and the themes defined were: Regional Development, Tourism, and University Cooperation⁹.

The third and last priority axis, highlighted in the two branches and held to be one of the main obstacles to true integration of the countries and their citizens, is the issue of border integration. Despite the growing importance that the member countries have been lending to the theme due to the strategic relevance of the border regions for integration, and although many advances have recently been seen, the national governments have been finding it difficult to coordinate their actions in these territories.

Apart from their global importance to development of the region, the border zones were traditionally left to fend for themselves, in part because of their distance from the capitals and large cities, and in part because in past decades they represented defense zones, zones of protection against threats, and were seldom or never seen as privileged areas of development and integration. The impact of this reality is undoubtedly more intense in the border cities and states, usually affected by low levels of economic and social development and a lack of perspectives. Thus, it is not by chance that the COMMITTEE, through its representatives, elected this theme as a priority, and identifies concrete possibilities for change of this territorial reality in the regional integration and development movements brought by MERCOSUR.

In regard to the political-institutional aspect, the COMMITTEE differs from the other MERCOSUR entities due to its nature, which is at the same time political, with members who are representatives directly elected by direct vote, and technical, with great potential for formulation and execution of public

⁹ In December 2007, the Meeting of Governors of the Mercosur North Front is expected to gather, in addition to the COMMITTEE members, including Venezuela, regional governments of the MERCOSUR Associated States such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Chile.

policies and integrationist initiatives. In this sense, approximating the COMMITTEE to the Common Market Council, the highest MERCOSUR decision-making entity, the entity that unites the presidents of the member countries, was an option adopted in its House Rules. The plenary meetings of the COMMITTEE thus invariably occur in the realm of the MERCOSUR Presidential Summits, and at each of them a representative, chosen on the eve of the summit during the plenary session, takes part in the Presidential Summit.

In their turn, the two branches, within the realm of the plenary session, gather once every six months, accompanying the MERCOSUR *pro tempore* Presidencies. However, the House Rules preserved their autonomy, so they can hold extraordinary sessions whenever they deem necessary. Their decisions must be announced in the name of the COMMITTEE, the sole entity from which the two committees derive. All decisions, recommendations, declarations, or any other manifestations of the COMMITTEE must be submitted to the CMG.

COMMITTEE perspectives

After slightly less than a year since its implementation, the COMMITTEE has a horizon of great challenges to be overcome in order to effectively establish itself as an entity capable of responding to the wants of territorial integration, within the realm of the MERCOSUR, based on the actions of its players: local and regional governments. At the same time, the creation of this entity, which unites democratic legitimacy, capacity for acting in networks, territorial capillary action, and speeding up concrete short-term actions, constitutes an excellent opportunity to contribute to consolidation of the MERCOSUR.

Created within the political environment of strategic resumption of the MERCOSUR by the member countries, focusing confrontation of the block's democratic deficit, the COMMITTEE will be able to convert itself into an alliance two-way street with citizenship in taking integration to the next level – taking integration to citizenship, and bringing citizenship to the MERCOSUR. To achieve

this end, the COMMITTEE will have to face serious challenges in the short-and medium-terms.

On the internal institutional level, the working structure adopted will demand some form of compensation to avoid imbalances and seek complementarities in the agendas of the two branches. In regard to this issue, inclusion of the experiences already developed by the States, Provinces, and Departments of regional integration, such as the CODESUL, the CRECENEA, and the ZICOSUL, among others, seems to be fundamental.

Within the institutional scope of the MERCOSUR, the options adopted up to the present by the COMMITTEE indicate perception of the importance lent to approximation with other MERCOSUR entities. The block's history shows the need for increased integration among the various levels, above all with the MERCOSUR Parliament, with a view to perfecting the actions, enhance their results, and avoid unnecessary duplications or superimpositions. Along this same line, the COMMITTEE will, with a view to full development of its potentialities, require that representatives of the local, regional, and national governments establish permanent channels of dialogue, which will call for adjustments on the part of all, since local-regional-national tensions will have to make space for the integrationist agenda.

Another major challenge for the COMMITTEE will be the construction of a political and cooperative agenda capable of generating concrete, measurable, and sustainable results. In other words, COMMITTEE actions must, simultaneously, focus long-term effects, following the agenda and the spirit of integration and of the MERCOSUR, and not only actions capable of having some impact at the present time. This issue has to do with the apparent contradiction between short-term vision, associated to local government actions, and long-term vision, already incorporated by the Nation States involved with projects that require planning extended over time, such as large infrastructure projects, and monetary or energy integration.

Will the subnational governments be capable of incorporating this dynamic? Or will they be able to counter it with quick actions of impact in the territory that bring direct results to the populations, actions that the Nation States are often incapable of executing?

Finally, the COMMITTEE's technical qualification reveals itself as one of the greatest obstacles to transforming its ambitious political agenda into an agenda of effective and sustainable cooperation. Lacking even the most basic bureaucratic structure that could allow it to respond to everyday issues, such as the organization of meetings and seminars, technical texts, mobilization of members and other activities, the COMMITTEE depends entirely on its members, but in an individual manner. Survival of the COMMITTEE as a relevant and powerful MERCOSUR entity will depend largely on finding ways to solve this question. It would be well to reflect to what extent the European Union could collaborate to advance this large and complex construction within the realm of its relations with Latin America (Sanahuja, 2006).

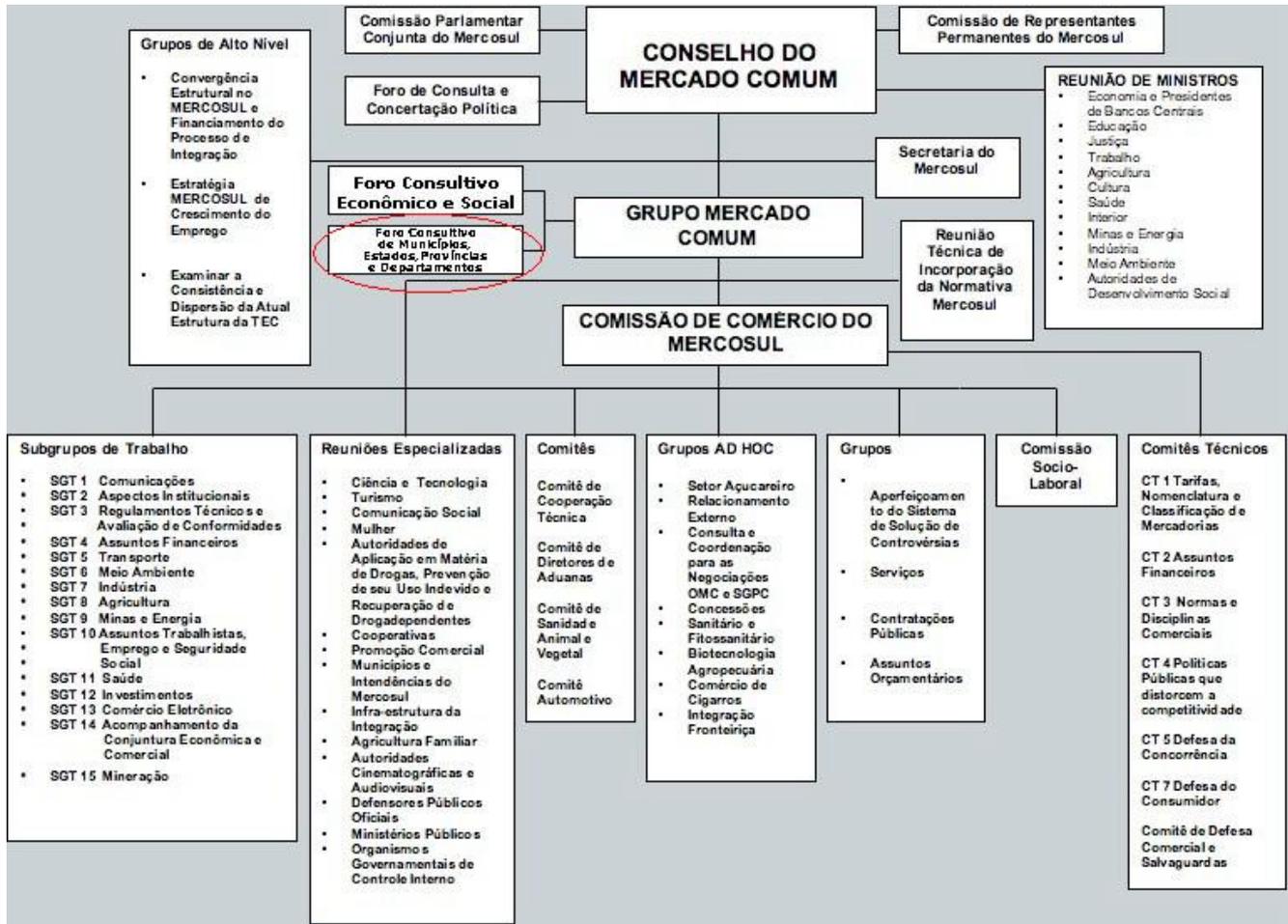
Overcoming such obstacles, however, is directly linked to the COMMITTEE's political objectives. Its consolidation will depend equally and directly on its capacity to establish itself as a relevant space not only in the eyes of its own members, but *vis-à-vis* the whole cast of MERCOSUR players. To this end, the political will (seen as a systematic and permanent commitment on the part of governments to attain the goals of public policies) of the COMMITTEE members themselves, as well as that of the member countries, to make sure that the entity grows strong and consolidates itself, will be fundamental for consolidation of the COMMITTEE within the framework of regional integration.

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8. ATTACHMENTS

Charter 1: Committee's place in the MERCOSUR' Structure



Charter 2: Actors involved – States branches and their role (Source: SAF, Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brasil, 2007).

Country	Branch/Government involved in the negotiations	Branch/Government which Coordinates at National Level	Role
Argentina	Subsecretaria de Relações Institucionais do Ministério das Relações Exteriores	Subsecretaria de Relações Institucionais do Ministério das Relações Exteriores	Main negotiator
Brazil	Subchefia de Assuntos Federativos da Presidência da República	Subchefia de Assuntos Federativos da Presidência da República	Support in the constitution process and following negotiations at at the CMG
Paraguay	Coordenação Nacional do Mercosul – Ministério das Relações Exteriores	Assessoria Jurídica do Ministério das Relações Exteriores	Support in the negotiations
Uruguay	Intendência de Montevideú e Coordenação Nacional do Mercosul, Ministério das Relações Exteriores	Presidência e vice-presidência do Congresso de Intendentes (eleitas anualmente)	Support in the constitution process and following negotiations at at the CMG
Venezuela	Departamento de América Latina e Caribe	Alcaldia Mayor de Caracas	Support for the National Coordination nomination (made by the President)

Charter 3: Meetings and Decisions of the Committee (Source: SAF, Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2007).

Place/date	Meeting/Activity	Decisions/Purposes
Rio de Janeiro, jan.2007.	Reunião de Instalação do FORO	- Carta do Rio - Plano de Trabalho dos dois Comitês
Buenos Aires, maio 2007.	1ª Reunião Extraordinária do Comitê de Municípios	- Subsídios dos municípios para o Regimento Interno
Tucumán, Argentina, maio 2007.	Encontro de Governadores do Nordeste brasileiro e do Noroeste argentino	- Agenda de Tucumán (cooperação nas áreas de desenvolvimento energético, social/habitação e turismo)
Assunção, Paraguai, jun.2007.	1ª Reunião do Pleno do FORO	- Conclusão do Regimento Interno (para aprovação do GMC) - criação de Grupo de Trabalho de integração fronteiriça
Montevideú, setembro 2007.	Reunião de Coordenadores Nacionais e dos Comitês	- Aprovação do Regimento Interno pelo GMC.
Short term Agenda		
Place/date	Meeting/Activity	Objectives
Pará, Brasil, dezembro 2007.	Encontro de Governadores da Frente Norte do Mercosul	- Expandir debate para territórios nacionais; - Aproximar regiões platina, andina e amazônica do Mercosul; - Elaborar Agenda de Cooperação
Montevideú, dezembro 2007.	Reunião do Pleno do FORO	- Encerramento da Presidência pro tempore uruguaia/início da PPT Argentina - Definição do Plano de Trabalho do FORO
Chubut, Argentina, abril 2008.	Encontro de Governadores Amazônia-Patagônia	- Expandir debate para territórios nacionais; - Elaborar Agenda de Cooperação

Charter 4 – Representatives to the Committee (Source: SAF, Brazil, 2007).



ARGENTINA

Federative States, Provinces and Departments Branch

Formosa – *Gob. Dr. Gildo Insfrán*
Corrientes – *Gob. Ing. Arturo Alejandro Colombi*
Santiago del Estero – *Gob. Dr. Gerardo Zamora*
Mendoza – *Gob. Ing. Julio César Cobos*
Chubut – *Gob. D. Mario Das Neves*
Santa Fé - *Ing. Jorge Alberto Obeid*
Jujuy – *Gob. Dr. Eduardo Alfredo Fellner*
Córdoba – *Gob. Dr. José Manuel De La Sota*
Tucumán – *Gob. D. José Jorge Alperovich*

Municipalities Branch

Morón – *Int. Martín Sabbatella (President of the Branch)*
La Matanz - *Int. Fernando Espinoza*
Tandil - *Int. Miguel Angel Lunghi*
C. de Buenos Aires - *Int. Jorge Telerman*
Florencio Varela - *Int. Julio Pereyra*
Rosario - *Int. D. Miguel Lifschitz*
Ituzaingó - *Int. Alberto D. Descalzo*



BRASIL

Federative States, Provinces and Departments Branch

Pará – *Governadora Ana Julia Carepa (President of the Branch)*
Acre – *Governador Binho Marques*
Amazonas – *Governador Eduardo Braga*
Bahia – *Governador Jaques Wagner*
Pernambuco – *Governador Eduardo Campos*
Espírito Santo – *Governador Paulo Hartung*
Rio de Janeiro – *Governador Sérgio Cabral*
Mato Grosso – *Governador Blairo Maggi*
Paraná – *Governador Roberto Requião*
Rio Grande do Sul – *Governadora Yeda Crusius*

Municipalities Branch

Santo André (SP) – *Prefeito João Avamileno*

São Carlos (SP) – *Prefeito Newton Lima*

Belo Horizonte (MG) – *Prefeito Fernando Pimentel*

Bagé (RS) – *Prefeito Luiz Fernando Mainardi*

Conselho de Desenvolvimento dos Municípios Lindeiros do Lago de Itaipu -
Prefeito Cláudio Dirceu Eberhard

Frente Nacional de Prefeitos - *Prefeito João Paulo Lins e Silva*

Associação Brasileira de Municípios - *Presidente José do Carmo*

Confederação Nacional de Municípios - *Presidente Paulo Ziulkoski*



URUGUAI

Municipalities Branch

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Salto – *Int. Ramón Fonticiella*

Montevideo - *Int Ricardo Erlich*

Paysandu - *Int Julio Pintos*

Rocha – *Int. Artigas Barrios*

Durazno – *Int. Carmelo Vidalin*

Maldonado – *Int. Oscar De Los Santos*

Tacuarembó – *Int. Wilson Ezquerra*

Canelones – *Int. Marcos Carambula*

Rivera - *Int. Tabare Viera*



PARAGUAI

Municipalities Branch

Assunción



VENEZUELA

Municipalities Branch

Distrito Metropolitano de Caracas