

Abstract

Over the past decade, South America has been undergoing many transformations, through which it has been experiencing rapid economic growth, has heightened its ability to act more autonomously from international influence on matters of decision-making, and in general is perceived to have become a more stable region in several aspects. In this outlook, South America is increasingly distinguishing itself from the rest of Latin America.

South America has been seeking integration for more than two centuries, when independence from the colonizing powers marked the introduction of the notion of integration in the region. However, most observers would argue that until now, South America has not succeeded in achieving its integration aims. Today, however, a new form of regional integration is being introduced in South America, which is said to differ significantly from previous integration schemes.

This time, integration is based on left governments, and thereby South America is thought to have entered a Post Neoliberal stage. Historical factors explain the need for a Post Neoliberal approach to government nowadays, as it may be the only sustainable way forward for the region's development. Post Neoliberalism is therefore at the core of new integration efforts. Particularly the recently established Unasur stands out as an initiative that has the potential for succeeding in the region's integration goals.

Unasur seeks to integrate the South American region on many levels and in a wide range of aspects. Although there have already been some advances, these are occurring gradually, and will still need to overcome many challenges. One major challenge may be that of achieving to speak with a single voice through Unasur, particularly since there seem to be two different political trends within the left that have developed in the region. There are clear differences for regional integration between the approach as promoted by Venezuela, and the center-left approach as promoted by Brazil. Today however, it seems Brazil is increasingly gaining ground in its approach towards Neoliberalism and integration, with South American governments increasingly identifying with Brazil's less-radical approach.

Conclusively, South America still has a long way to go before achieving true integration through Unasur, although there are sufficient reasons to be optimistic about the future of Unasur. Thereby, if Unasur is able to overcome its challenges and thereby succeeds in truly consolidating itself as a region, Unasur may succeed in largely eliminating historically-rooted regional problems, and would additionally have a positive geopolitical impact on South America's international standing.