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THE DRAFT PROTOCOL ON THE CREATION OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE OF MERCOSUR – A NEW MILESTONE IN THE JUDICIALIZATION OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION LAW

W. M. KÜHN^a

^a*EFTA Surveillance Authority, 35 Belliard Street, Brussels B-1040, Belgium*

Several years have passed since Parlasur submitted a draft protocol to the Member States of Mercosur for approval, envisaging the creation of a permanent Court of Justice for this South American integration system. Repeated calls for a reform of Mercosur's dispute settlement mechanism have remained unheard ever since, as the national governments' focus of attention has shifted to the economic and political difficulties this regional integration system had to face. The recent election of a new government in Argentina has raised hopes that the reform would be finally implemented. The present article will explain the reasons for the necessity of this reform. It will further provide an account of the key features of the draft protocol, which intends to remedy the shortcomings of the dispute settlement mechanism currently in place, while highlighting the influence European and Latin American integration law has had. The conclusion to be drawn is that the draft protocol constitutes a milestone in the judicialization of regional integration law and that a failure to make it legally binding would have to be considered a missed opportunity for regional economic integration.

Key words: supranationality; procedural law; dispute settlement mechanisms; comparative law; Mercosur; Andean Community; Central American Integration System; European Union; European Free Trade Association; Eurasian Economic Union.

ПРОЕКТ ПРОТОКОЛА О СОЗДАНИИ СУДА СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТИ МЕРКОСУР – НОВАЯ ВЕХА ЮРИДИЗАЦИИ ПРАВА РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ

В. М. КЮН¹⁾

¹⁾*Надзорный орган Европейской ассоциации свободной торговли, ул. Бельяр, 35, В-1040, г. Брюссель, Бельгия*

Несколько лет прошло с того момента, как ПАРЛАСУР представил на утверждение государствам – членам МЕРКОСУР проект протокола о создании постоянного судебного органа настоящего интеграционного объединения южноамериканского региона. Отмечается, что неоднократные призывы к реформе механизма урегулирования споров в МЕРКОСУР до сих пор не были услышаны, поскольку внимание национальных правительств переключилось на экономические и политические трудности, с которыми сталкивалась региональная интеграционная система. Состоявшиеся выборы в Аргентине оставляют надежду на то, что реформа в итоге будет проведена. Предпринимается попытка объяснить причины необходимости такой реформы. Анализируются основные черты проекта протокола, который стремится устранить недостатки механизма урегулирования споров в настоящее время, подчеркивается влияние на этот процесс европейского и латиноамериканского интеграционного права. Делается вывод о том, что проект протокола представляет собой краеугольный камень юридизации регионального интеграционного права, отказ сделать его юридически обязательным будет рассматриваться как упущенная возможность для региональной экономической интеграции.

Ключевые слова: наднациональность; процессуальное право; механизмы разрешения споров; сравнительное право; МЕРКОСУР; Андское сообщество; интеграционное объединение Центральной Америки; Европейский союз; Европейская ассоциация свободной торговли; Евразийский экономический союз.

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Автор:

Вернер Мигель Кюн – доктор права; старший сотрудник.

Author:

Werner Miguel Kühn, doctor of law; senior officer.
wku@eftasurv.int

Introduction

In December 2010, after an intense debate, *Parlasur* – the parliamentary assembly of Mercosur – expressed its support in favour of the establishment of a court of justice for Mercosur. The authors of the draft protocol creating the necessary legal basis were the deputies *Alfonso Rodríguez Súa* (Argentina) and *Eric Salum Pires* (Paraguay). After the adoption of the resolution approving it, the draft protocol was submitted to the *Consejo del Mercado Común (CMC)* – the supreme political body of Mercosur – for deliberation¹, which has failed to scrutinize it to this date. This is regrettable, given the important innovations the draft protocol introduces to Mercosur's dispute settlement mechanism. Admittedly, Mercosur had to face more urgent matters, such as the admission of Venezuela as a mem-

ber, as well as the suspension of Paraguay's membership following the institutional crisis in that country² [1]. In addition, Bolivia's interest in joining the trade bloc despite its membership in the *Andean Community (CAN)*³ remains unbroken. However, after having overcome most of these challenges, the time would appear ripe for a new attempt to adjust the institutional framework to the demands of the integration process. Before explaining the details of the reform, it appears sensible to describe concisely the current setup of Mercosur's dispute settlement mechanism. A closer look at the deficiencies of this mechanism will make clear why various legal scholars have called for a reform [2]. The draft protocol must be regarded as an initiative aimed at providing a political answer to this appeal.

Mercosur's current dispute settlement mechanism

Actions aimed at pursuing infringements

Article 33 of the UN Charter provides that a dispute settlement mechanism is an important instrument for the pacific solution of international conflicts, listing up a few examples: negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of the parties' choice. The *Protocol of Olivos* put in place the *Tribunal Permanente de Revisión (TPR)* in Mercosur, which aims at solving disputes concerning the interpretation, the application and the infringement of Mercosur law, which comprises the *Treaty of Asunción (TA)* – the treaty by which Mercosur was established, – its protocols and the agreements concluded, as well as the disputes arising in connection with decisions, resolutions and directives adopted by Mercosur bodies having decision-making competence. Notwithstanding this, the Member States of Mercosur have the right to submit their controversies to the WTO or any other dispute settlement mechanism.

The origins of the dispute settlement mechanism currently in place in Mercosur go back to the *Protocol of Brasilia (PB)*, which was replaced by the *Protocol of Olivos (PO)*. The PB introduced a dispute settlement mechanism similar to the one, which exists in the *North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)*⁴, whereas the

PO reshaped it so as to create one resembling more to the mechanism in place in the *European Union (EU)* and the CAN. Even though the PO creates a more sophisticated mechanism than the one in place in NAFTA, it does not reach the level of sophistication attained by the EU or the CAN, as it does not foresee the establishment of a permanent court of justice but rather of a TPR.

Another essential difference is the participation of individuals in the dispute settlement mechanism. There is no possibility under the PO to activate the dispute settlement mechanism directly, an option which does exist in the EU and in the CAN. The mechanisms in place in these integration systems allow individuals to submit their disputes before a permanent court of justice without the prior intervention of the respective Member State. Articles 39 and 40 PO provide for the right of individuals to lodge complaints before the respective National Section of the *Grupo del Mercado Común (GMC)* – the executive body of Mercosur – concerning legislative or administrative measures allegedly having restrictive effect or liable to distort competition, in breach of Mercosur law. The procedure foresees that the complainants must provide elements of evidence confirming the authenticity of the breach as well as the existence or the threat of damage, so as

¹The draft protocol was handled as dossier MEP 134/09 and submitted to the “*Comisión de Asuntos Jurídicos e Institucional*” (“CAJI”) of *Parlasur*. After a year of assessment, the draft protocol was submitted to the plenary session of *Parlasur* for debate, which accepted it as Legislative Proposal 2/10 of 13 December 2010. After the parliamentary approval, the draft protocol was submitted to the CMC on 14 December 2010 for its consideration and final approval.

²The institutional crisis caused by the impeachment of President *Fernando Lugo*, the subsequent suspension of Paraguay in Mercosur on grounds of an alleged breach of the Protocol of Ushuaia regarding the Commitment of Mercosur to Democracy, and the entry of Venezuela in the organization as a full member led to litigation before the TPR.

³The CAN is a South American integration system established in 1969, comprising Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Chile left in 1976 and Venezuela left in 2006 in order to join Mercosur. Associated States are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama, Mexico and Chile, while Spain has observer status. The objective of this integration system is to create a customs union and a common market between its members.

⁴The principal dispute settlement mechanisms of the NAFTA are found in Chapter 11 (Settlement of disputes between a party and an investor of another party), Chapter 19 (Mechanism to provide an alternative to judicial review by domestic courts of final determinations in antidumping and countervailing duty cases, with review by independent binational panels) and Chapter 20 (Disputes regarding the interpretation or application of the NAFTA).

to allow the complaint to be formally admitted by the National Section and assessed by the GMC and the group of experts summoned to this purpose.

The dispute settlement mechanism of Mercosur consists essentially of the following stages: (i) bilateral negotiations between Member States; (ii) the submission of the dispute to the GMC through consultations and complaints; and (iii) the arbitration procedure before the *ad hoc* panel and the TPR. When a dispute arises, the first step is to launch bilateral negotiations⁵. If no agreement is found, it is possible to opt for the procedure before the *Comisión de Comercio (CCM)*, which does not preclude lodging a complaint before the GMC, which will formulate detailed – but non-binding – recommendations on how to solve the dispute. Where the settlement of the dispute in the two previous procedural stages has been unsuccessful, any of the Member States involved may inform the *Secretaría Administrativa (Secretariat)* – the body in charge of providing technical support to the other Mercosur bodies – of its intention to resort to the arbitration procedure, thus starting the third and last stage, which implies setting up an *ad hoc* panel.

Every *ad hoc* panel is made up of three members. Every Member State involved in the dispute shall designate one panel member respectively, while the third panel member, who chairs the panel and may not be a national of neither of the Member States, shall be designated by common agreement. In the event that no agreement should be found on the choice of the chair, the PO provides that the *Secretariat* shall designate it on the basis of a list of candidates drawn up to this purpose. The Member States have the right to designate their representatives and legal counsels. As the name suggests, the *ad hoc* panel is a tribunal expressly created for the resolution of the dispute in question. The panel must therefore limit itself to rule on the subject matter of the dispute, determined by the written submissions and the pleadings of the parties. The parties must submit their factual and legal observations in support of their respective views.

Article 17 PO provides that any of the Member States involved in the dispute may appeal the panel decision before the TPR within 15 days after the notification of the decision to the parties. The TPR is composed of five arbiters, designated by each Member State, and a reserve arbiter, this one being elected by unanimous vote. The arbiters must be available on a permanent basis whenever they are needed. The TPR shall adopt a ruling within 30 days (with a possibility of extension for another 15 days). The TPR has the power

to confirm, modify or revoke the legal reasoning and the decisions adopted by the *ad hoc* panel. The TPR's arbitral award will be final, overriding the *ad hoc* panel's decision adopted.

It is feasible to skip certain stages of the procedure foreseen by the dispute settlement mechanism, as Article 23 PO provides for the possibility for the parties to submit the dispute immediately and in last instance to the TPR, however only once the direct negotiations have ended. In this case, the TPR has the same competence as an *ad hoc* panel, with the consequence that its arbitral awards have the effect of *res iudicata*. They cannot be subject to a revision, for it has been adopted by the judicial body of last instance created by the PO. The importance of Article 23 PO lies in giving the Member States the option of saving the time usually consumed by the regular dispute settlement mechanism created by the PB and refined by the PO. The regular procedure can last up to 195 days (including the possible extension of deadlines) since the beginning of the direct negotiations. The frequent use of the option laid down in Article 23 PO by the Member States involved is likely to favour a development by which going through the initial stages of the procedure might eventually be rendered futile, turning the TPR into a permanent court of justice. However, for the time being, the Member States have shied away from taking this next, crucial step.

The arbitral awards – of both the *ad hoc* panels and the TPR – must be adopted by a majority, contain an account of reasons and be signed by the chair and the other arbiters. The arbiters must keep the confidentiality of the deliberation and the voting. The parties to the dispute must comply with the arbitral award within the time limits specified. In the event that the Member State party to the dispute should not comply with the arbitral award, the harmed party is allowed to apply countermeasures in order to avoid any damages. Where proof has been adduced of a situation likely to cause grave and irreparable damages, it is for the parties possible to request interim measures. Before the entry into force of the PO, interim measures could be ordered until the *ad hoc* panel would adopt its arbitral award. Nowadays, the effect of interim measures end when the TPR has adopted its arbitral award.

Mechanisms aimed at obtaining an interpretation or verification of validity of integration law

To a similar extent as other integration systems⁶ [3; 4], Mercosur has a mechanism in place allowing certain bodies to request an interpretation of the in-

⁵This mechanism bears a slight similarity with the dispute settlement mechanism of the Eurasian Economic Union (EurAsEU) in so far as the latter also prescribes a mandatory attempt of pre-trial resolution prior to a referral of the matter to CJ-EurAsEU, according to Article 43 of its Statute.

⁶See Article 267 TFUE in the EU (“preliminary rulings”); Article 34 SCA in the EFTA pillar of the EEA (“advisory opinions”); Article 32 TTJCAN in the CAN (“cuestiones prejudiciales”); Article 22 lit. k Statute CJ-SICA in the SICA (“consultas prejudiciales”). The Court of Justice of the Eurasian Economic Community (“CJ-EurAsEC”) used to have the competence laid down in Article 3 of the *Private Litigants Treaty* to give “advisory opinions” upon request of a national supreme court, even though it was only used once during its existence. The Court of Justice of the Eurasian Economic Union (“CJ-EurAsEU”) has not been conferred any similar competence.

tegration system's common rules⁷. The *Opiniones Consultativas* are reasoned decisions adopted by the TPR in response to legal questions submitted, concerning the interpretation and application of the Mercosur in an individual case, with a view to safeguard its uniform application in the territory of the Member States. The mechanism is also applicable in circumstances in which it is necessary to verify the validity a specific legal act or provision of integration law. It can be invoked by the Member States acting jointly, the bodies of Mercosur having decision-making powers – CMC, GMC and CCM, – the Supreme Courts of the Member States and the Parlasur.

Secondary Mercosur legislation allows the Supreme Courts to extend this competence to other supreme judicial bodies of the Member States⁸, a competence which has not yet been made use of. Conversely, there is no legal provision in Mercosur law allowing lower national courts to refer questions directly to the TPR without the intermediary of the Supreme Courts. In other words, lower national courts must submit their questions on interpretation of Mercosur law to the Supreme Courts before a referral to the TPR is possible at all. This is explicitly prescribed by secondary Mercosur legislation⁹, which requires the adoption of national implementing measures, a task which has been entrusted not to the Parliaments but to the Supreme Courts [5]. Internal legislation adopted in the meantime by the Supreme Courts of all Member States specifies that all national courts may initiate a referral, either at first instance or at appeal level, as well as *motu proprio* or upon request by any of the parties to the procedure. Request for referrals must originate in judicial procedures before national courts. The manner in which the implementing national legislation has been drafted in all Member States allows the conclusion that the interpretation of the Mercosur law in question must be deemed relevant for the resolution of the dispute. Given the fact that only the Supreme Courts are allowed to refer questions directly to the TPR, while the role of lower national courts is rather limited to request a referral and to pre-formulate the questions, there is no distinction between facultative and obligatory referrals as is the case in the legal sys-

tems of the EU¹⁰ and the CAN¹¹. The procedure initiated by the national courts is officially considered to be of “judicial cooperation” for the reason that it does not require the involvement of the ministries of foreign affairs or any other bodies belonging to the executive branch. The Supreme Courts' role is to declare the request for referrals admissible.

The TPR has 65 days to respond to the questions referred¹². The opinion must be based on Mercosur law and can be adopted by a majority of votes. The decision must state any dissenting votes should there be any. It is important noting that the opinion is neither binding nor obligatory¹³. However, it is generally presumed to have a certain *de facto* authority, as it is produced by a highly specialized judicial body [6]. The national delegations at the GMC may submit written observations within 15 days after the notification of the admissibility of the request of an opinion, with the aim of supporting the TPR in its deliberations. Once the decision has been adopted, the procedure comes to an end, although Mercosur law foresees two scenarios, which go beyond the TPR's scope of competence: the non-presentation of opinions for particular reasons and the beginning of a dispute as the result of an opinion.

Mercosur's longinner struggle over the future of its institutional framework

Contrary to other integrations systems in the Americas – more specifically, the CAN and the *Central American Integration System (SICA)*,¹⁴ – Mercosur has opted for an intergovernmental model of integration, deliberately rejecting any attempt to infuse elements of supranationality into its legal system [7]¹⁵. Consequently, Mercosur has a very lean institutional framework, a trait that becomes particularly evident in the manner in which its dispute settlement mechanism is configured, characterized *inter alia* by (1) the instrumentalisation by the State of the individual affected by a breach of Mercosur law in order to pursue infringements by other Member States rather than by bodies safeguarding the integrity of the legal system, (2) the resort to direct negotiations between the Member States and (3) the use of an arbitration system.

⁷See Article 9 MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 37/03.

⁸See MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 02/07.

⁹See MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 02/07 and MERCOSUR/GMC/RES. No. 40/04 and 41/04.

¹⁰See Article 267(3) TFEU.

¹¹See Article 33 TTJCAN. See the explanations by the TJCAN on facultative and obligatory referrals, clearly inspired by the case-law of the ECJ, in Cases 154-IP-2011, p. 6 and 57-IP-2012, p. 5.

¹²See MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 15/10.

¹³See Article 11 MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 37/03.

¹⁴The SICA is a Central American integration system established in 1991, comprising El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua y Panamá. Costa Rica left in 2015. Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, USA, Ecuador, Uruguay, Colombia, China (Taiwan), Spain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Australia, South Korea, France, HolySee, United Kingdom, EU, New Zealand, Morocco, Qatar and Turkey have observer status. The objectives of SICA are the promotion of democracy, security and economic development in the region.

¹⁵Explains that, at the time of creation of Mercosur, the political will to put in place an authentic judicial body was lacking.

The initial belief in the advantages of such a model has given way to serious doubts by legal scholars as to whether the lack of a robust institutional framework will manage to contribute to the further development of the integration process [8; 9]. An inter-governmental integration model becomes vulnerable when it is obliged to rely exclusively on the good will of its Member States, in particular when they have an overly presidential format, as is the case of Argentina and Brazil. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the absence of any mechanisms to reduce asymmetries (in terms of economic and, ultimately, of political power), relying rather on an unrealistic “formal” equality between the Member States. An integration system, which does not prevent Member States from using economic and/or power as a leverage to enforce their interests, does not inspire confidence in its legal system.

Lack of legal certainty is detrimental to the survival of an integration system in the long run. In order to depoliticize disputes and to strengthen Mercosur’s legal system for the benefit of the citizens, the idea of creating a permanent court of justice of Mercosur was proposed by various legal scholars. A major concern was the need to ensure the uniform interpretation and application of Mercosur law. It was feared that leaving it to the national courts to interpret Mercosur law in light of their own legal traditions and using their methodologies would lead to a situation, in which Mercosur law would not have the same validity or effect from one Member State or another.

It was also argued that the arbitration model appeared to be more appropriate for an association or a cooperation agreement rather than for an ambitious process, whose objective is to achieve integration at legal, commercial, economic, social and cultural level. Indeed, Article 1 TA provides that the Member States agree to establish a common market, implying the free movement of goods, services and production factors, the creation of a customs union and the adoption of a common trade policy, as well as the coordination of macro-economic and sectorial policies in the area of foreign trade, agriculture, industrial development, taxation, monetary policy and capitals, services, customs, transport and communication and other to be agreed upon, apart from guaranteeing adequate conditions of competition in the Member States.

Mercosur law was expected to gradually evolve into community law and the arbitration model was considered inadequate, once Mercosur would have been left behind its foundational phase. The very nature of *ad hoc* panels was regarded as an obstacle to ensuring a uniform case-law. The lack of established rules of procedure was deemed to undermine legal certainty, as it could not be ruled that the *ad hoc* panels might rule

differently in similar disputes. Furthermore, it was argued that even though a mechanism foreseeing negotiation and arbitration might solve individual conflicts, it would not guarantee a uniformity of general resolution criteria applicable to all cases. In addition, the solution of conflicts by consensus and, in the majority of cases, by intergovernmental non-judicial bodies lacking independence, by arbiters lacking experience, appeared unbearable. The establishment of the TPR as a permanent arbitration panel was seen as major step in the further institutionalization of Mercosur, as it reflected the aspiration by the Member States to create a “community of law”, with at least a “judicial instance” on its top. It should be noted in this context that various provisions of primary Mercosur law had foreseen the creation of a “permanent dispute settlement mechanism” (although not necessarily a court of justice)¹⁶.

Apart from the deficiencies of the dispute settlement system described above, the view was taken that the current dispute settlement mechanism failed to guarantee proper access to justice to individuals. In fact, individuals are only allowed to lodge complaints in certain areas, while active legitimation to bring disputes before the resolution bodies lies only with the Member States. Commentators harbored hope that a future permanent court of justice might help implement such a fundamental right as the access to justice.

The conviction grew that a harmonious interpretation of Mercosur law meant the basis of every integration process and that it could only be achieved by means of a permanent judicial body bestowed with the competence of interpretation, being the interpretation given binding upon the Member States. There were doubts concerning the right approach though, as the view was taken by some that the creation of a court of justice would not make sense before Mercosur law had not evolved into community law. According to this viewpoint, a judicial dialogue would have to start between the national supreme courts, which would eventually create a body of case-law and provide normative content to Mercosur law. According to the opposite view, the creation of a court of justice was an urgent step to take, recalling in this context the European integration experience, which in their opinion had been characterized by the creation of strong institutions designed by lawyers, ultimately facilitating economic integration.

After having described Mercosur’s dispute settlement mechanism and put in evidence its deficiencies, the following analysis will focus on the major traits of the reform introduced by the draft protocol and explain the manner in which it intends to address these shortcomings.

¹⁶Annex III No. 3 Treaty of Asunción; Article 34 PB (repealed); Article 44 PoP; Article 53 PO.

Major traits of the dispute settlement mechanism introduced by the draft protocol

Procedure required for its enactment

Contrary to the situation in the EU and to what its character as parliamentary assembly might suggest, the Parlasur is a consultative body of Mercosur without any legislative powers¹⁷. Its competence in connection with the draft protocol is therefore limited to submitting it to the CMC for political approval in accordance with Article 4(13) of the *Constitutive Protocol of the Mercosur Parliament*. For the protocol to become legally binding, the Member States represented in the CMC would have to incorporate it into the legal order of Mercosur by approving it in accordance with their respective national constitutional requirements [10]. In order for the future judicial body to become operational immediately and without restraints, the simultaneous entry into force of the draft protocol would have to be ensured. For that purpose, the implementation procedure laid down in Article 40 PO would have to be used, which foresees that, once the Mercosur legal act has been adopted, the Member States must proceed to adopt the necessary national implementing measures. Once this has occurred, they must notify it to the Secretariat, which will inform all Member States. The aforementioned provision further states that the national implementing measures must enter into force and be published in the official journals of the Member States 30 days following the notification by the Secretariat. As complicated as this procedure may sound, Mercosur has already enough experience with the incorporation of protocols in its legal system and nothing suggests that the incorporation of the draft protocol – once approved by the CMC – might encounter difficulties [11].

As any other legislative proposal, the draft protocol contains a statement of reasons, explaining the objectives pursued. The recitals call for the establishment of a *Court of Justice of Mercosur (CJM)* as an independent judicial body, whose objective shall be the uniform interpretation and application of Mercosur law. The CJM is meant to be a contribution to the legal and institutional consolidation of the integration process. The draft protocol draws expressly from the experience gained in the application of both the protocols laying down the legal basis for Mercosur's current dispute settlement mechanism and the mechanisms in place in other integration systems characterized by a supranational format such as the EU, CAN and SICA. The recitals confirm that the

draft a protocol is essentially the product of a profound comparative study of integration law.

By using a new terminology, different from the one used at national level, the draft protocol clarifies that the CJM is supposed to become a distinct, specialized, judicial instance, anchored in the institutional framework of Mercosur. It is also evident that the drafters' intention was to depart from the arbitration model currently in place. In other words, the CJM is supposed to replace the current dispute settlement mechanism entirely. The draft protocol stresses the need to guarantee legal certainty, by pointing at the progress achieved in other integrations systems, which have developed more advanced dispute settlement mechanisms.

The recitals refer to previous resolutions of Parlasur and national supreme courts, calling for the establishment of a judicial body for Mercosur¹⁸. Reference is also made to several provisions in Mercosur primary law, envisaging the establishment of a "permanent dispute settlement mechanism". All these references indicate that the draft protocol has been expressly developed with a view to address these requests. The process of judicialization of Mercosur is seen by the drafters as an important stage in the evolution of the integration system as a whole.

Remarkable in this context is the fact that the draft protocol refers to the CJM as a compensation for the absence of a "judicial instance of community law". Bearing in mind that it is the unanimous opinion in the TPR's case-law¹⁹ and in legal theory [12] that Mercosur law does not qualify as "community law" at its current stage of development, this necessarily implies that the establishment of the CJM must be understood as a step towards the transformation of Mercosur into a supranational legal system, autonomous and *sui generis*.

Structure of the draft protocol

Organizational aspects. The draft protocol is a well-structured document, which sets out the jurisdiction, the configuration and the competences of the CJM. It provides that the CJM shall be based in Asunción – the capital of Paraguay – and shall have exclusive jurisdiction for disputes concerning the legal system of Mercosur. This constitutes an important turning point in the evolution of Mercosur, in particular given the loss of confidence that some Member

¹⁷Article 24 TA provides for the creation of a "Joint Parliamentary Commission", however, without specifying its competences. These are set out in detail in Article 4 of the Constitutive Protocol of the Mercosur Parliament (MERCOSUR/CMC/DEC. No. 23/05) and consist essentially in surveying the integration process, submitting opinions, suggestions as well as legislative proposals for consideration by the CMC and/or the national parliaments. The members of Parlasur are meant to be elected directly by the citizens of the Member States (to this date, only Paraguay in 2008 and Argentina in 2015 have created the necessary legal conditions for a direct election). Parlasur hopes to evolve into a genuine legislative body similar to the European Parliament.

¹⁸Parlasur, Declaration No. 23/08 concerning the 6th Meeting of National Supreme Courts of 21 November 2008 in Brasilia; Declaration No. 1/09 concerning the World Crisis / National Supreme Courts, Final Declaration on the occasion of the 7th Meeting of 2 September 2009 in Buenos Aires.

¹⁹See TPR decision No. 1/2005 of 20 December 2005, in which the TPR characterizes Mercosur law as "integration law", contrary to "community law", which Mercosur does not yet have due to lack of "the sought-after supranational character".

States had shown in the current dispute settlement mechanism in the past, manifested by the referral of disputes to the WTO's rather than to the integration system's own panel system²⁰. This is possible under Article 1(2) PO, which contains a forum choice clause. According to this provision, a Member State can always choose whether to resort to the Mercosur system for the settlement of disputes or to a different mechanism to which it is a party, such as the multilateral settlement of the WTO. However, once the choice has been made and the procedures have started, the party cannot resort to a second forum.

The draft protocol reflects the principle of conferral, by providing that the CJM shall be structured and exercise its competences as stipulated therein. As regards the institutional structure, the draft protocol specifies that the CJM shall be composed of judges – whose number shall be equal to the number of Member States – and deputy judges. However, it provides for a possible increase in the number of judges and the creation of an *Advocate General* by the CMC upon a proposal by the CJM. By foreseeing the figure of the Advocate General, the CJM clearly borrows from the European integration experience. It remains to be seen whether this provision will ever be implemented or will rather remain *lettre morte*, as has been the case in the CAN. While Article 6(3) of the *Treaty establishing the Court of Justice of the CAN (TTJCAN)* and Article 142 of its Statute provides for the creation of the figure of the Advocate General by the *Andean Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers* upon consultation of the TJCAN, this legal basis has not been yet invoked, allegedly due to the low number of cases. In any case, it is notable that the draft protocol refrains from defining the competences of the Advocate General, leaving the implementation to the future Statute of the CJM.

Stressing the absolute independence of the members of the CJM appears to have been of paramount importance to the drafters of the protocol, which must be seen in light of the difficulties related to the current panel system. Teaching assignments are regarded as the only activity compatible with the exercise of judicial functions. The provisions on judicial indepen-

dence are far-reaching and modelled after the regulation currently in place in the SICA since the establishment of its Court of Justice (CJ-SICA) by the *Protocol of Tegucigalpa*²¹.

The same applies to the procedure for the selection of judges, clearly inspired by Article 10(1) of the *Statute of the CJ-SICA*²². According to this procedure, the Supreme Court of each Member State shall draw up a list of candidates, following the provisions in national legislation laying down the procedure for the selection of Supreme Court judges. However, contrary to the situation in the SICA, where also the appointment of the judges is carried out by the Supreme Court of each Member State, this stage of the procedures falls within the competence of the national governments [13]. The judges of CJM shall be appointed for a term of 6 years and be eligible for reappointment²³. In order to avoid parity in the number of judges, which might hinder majority votes, the draft protocol appears to introduce a solution foreseen in the CAN, as in those circumstances, an additional judge shall be appointed by absolute majority. With a view to ensure that the functioning of the CJM is not compromised by the absence of a judge, the draft provides for the appointment of substitute judges, who must fulfil the same professional requirements as the ordinary judges. As regards these requirements, the CJM follows the example of the EU²⁴, the SICA²⁵ and the CAN²⁶, by requiring that *judges shall be chosen from persons whose independence is beyond doubt and who possess the qualifications required for appointment to the highest judicial offices in their respective countries or who are jurisconsults of recognised competence*²⁷. Judges may only be removed by unanimous decision of CJM, upon request by all Member States, in case of a grave violation in the fulfilment of their duties, to be specified in the CJM Statute.

Apart from judges and the possible creation of an Advocate General, the draft protocol envisages that the position of the Registrar will be filled and staff will be hired. The methodology chosen for their appointment is the one of an international public *concours*.

The draft protocol contains detailed provisions concerning the immunities to be granted to the judges, the

²⁰ Brazil had initiated a procedure against Argentina in an antidumping case by resorting first to the panel system foreseen in the PB. Not satisfied by the panel decision, it had subsequently brought the matter before the WTO's dispute settlement system (case WT/DS 241). As a consequence, the WTO panel had been called upon to interpret Mercosur rules.

²¹ The Protocol of Tegucigalpa, by which the institutional framework of the SICA was modified so as to establish a judicial body, is an international treaty concluded by the Member States of the SICA on the occasion of the 11th presidential summit (held on 13 December 1991 in Managua). See, as regards the independence of judges, the far-reaching provisions in Articles 12, 14, 15 and 29 of the Protocol.

²² The Statute of the CJ-SICA is an international treaty, which was concluded by the Member States of the SICA on the occasion of the 13th presidential summit (held on 9–11 December 1992 in Panama) and entered into force on 2 February 1994.

²³ Similar to the ECJ, EFTA Court and TJCAN, whereas judges at the CJ-SICA and at the Court of Justice of the Eurasian Economic Union ("CJ-EurAsEU") are appointed for a term of 10 years and 9 years respectively.

²⁴ See Article 253 TFEU.

²⁵ See Article 9 Statute of the CJ-SICA.

²⁶ See Article 6 TTJCAN.

²⁷ Other integration systems have similar criteria concerning the appointment of judges for their respective judicial bodies, for example, the EurAsEU (see Articles 9, 18–21 Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU) and EFTA (see Article 30 SCA), combining requirements of competence and independence, necessary for the fulfilment of their duties.

Registrar and other staff. While judges possess the same immunity as chiefs of mission, in accordance with the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*, the immunity granted to the Registrar and public servants is merely functional, restrained to cover the exercise of their respective functions. The protection of the CJM's archives and official postal communication is guaranteed.

According to the draft protocol, the CJM shall adopt its statute, which shall be approved by the CMC, following the positive vote of Parlasur. Furthermore, the CJM shall adopt its internal regulation and rules of procedure.

The draft protocol imposes certain reporting duties on CJM with regard to the Parlasur and the CMC, in order to reinforce the CJM's democratic accountability. A remarkable aspect of the draft protocol is the establishment of a system of own financial resources for the CJM. It provides that the CJM's budget shall be covered by a percentage of Mercosur's revenues derived from customs duties on imports. If this system were to be implemented, the CJM's autonomy and supranational nature would be emphasized. This would constitute a novelty in the history of South American and partly also of European integration, where integration systems rely on direct financial contributions from the Member States²⁸. In the EU, on the contrary, financial self-sufficiency is guaranteed mainly by a system composed of the traditional own resources (customs duties on imports from outside the EU and sugar levies), the resources based on value added tax and a percentage of each Member State's gross national income.

Competences and system of procedures. The provisions in the draft protocol setting out the competences of and the system procedures before the CJM must be regarded as the most important European contribution. In the same manner as the CAN several decades ago, Mercosur transposes the European experience to the South American reality by conferring on the CJM similar competences as the ECJ.

(a) *Action for annulment.* An action for annulment can be brought against any act of secondary law adopted by the CMC, the GMC, the CCM and other bodies of Mercosur, in violation of the integration system's legal system, in particular against *ultra vires* legal acts.

Plaintiff can be by any Member State, the Parlasur, the CMC, the GMC, the CCM, the Secretariat and – provided that their subjective rights and legitimate interests are affected – also individuals. The CJM thus adopts the distinction between so-called preferential and non-preferential plaintiffs known in EU law. One interesting difference lies, however, in the fact that active legitimacy can be extended to other Mercosur bodies by decision of the CMC, upon proposal from the CJM and approval of the Parlasur.

Another important characteristic of the rules introduced by the draft protocol is the more generous access to justice granted to individuals, made possible by an active legitimacy defined in broader terms. As already mentioned, individuals may challenge legal acts also when their "legitimate interests" are affected, as is nowadays also the case under CAN law²⁹. This clearly distinguishes South American procedural law from European procedural law with its two main representatives – EU law³⁰ and EFTA law³¹, – under which active legitimacy is granted to the addressee of the legal act in question and to anyone else provided that this legal act be of his "direct and individual concern". This difference becomes more evident in view of the strict interpretation given to this legal requirement by the European Courts³².

The application of the action for annulment does not suspend or affect the validity of the legal act challenged. However, the CJM may, upon request by any of the parties to the procedure, order the provisional suspension of the legal act challenged or adopt other interim measures, if the application of the act or the absence of the interim measures risk causing irreparable damages to any of the parties³³.

The draft protocol enables the CJM to specify the temporal effects of its judgement in case that it should declare the total or partial annulment of the legal act challenged. It imposes on the Mercosur body whose act has been annulled the obligation to adopt the necessary measures to guarantee compliance with the judgement within the time limit specified by the CJM³⁴.

The time limit for an action for annulment is of 6 months after the entry into force of the legal act challenged³⁵. However, in a legal dispute concerning

²⁸ See Article 36 PO; Article 41 of the Statute of the CJ-SICA; Article 27 TTJCAN; Article 48 SCA and Article 20 TEurAsEU.

²⁹ See Article 19 TTJCAN.

³⁰ See Article 263(4) TFEU.

³¹ See Article 36(2) SCA.

³² See joined cases C-463/10 P and C-475/10 P, *Deutsche Post AG and Germany v Commission*, EU:C:2011:656, paras. 37-38; Case E-2/02, *Technologien Bau- und Wirtschaftsberatung GmbH and Bellona Foundation v ESA*, paras. 41-79.

³³ The situation is similar in the EU (see Articles 278 and 279 TFEU), EFTA (see Articles 40 and 41 SCA) and CAN (see Article 21 TTJCAN).

³⁴ The situation is similar in the EU (see Article 264(2) TFEU; Case C-211/01, *Commission v Council*, EU:C:2003:452, paras. 54-57) and CAN (Article 22 TTJCAN).

³⁵ This differs from the situation in the EU (see Article 263(6) TFEU) and EFTA (see Article 36(2) SCA), where it is foreseen that proceedings shall be instituted within two months of the publication of the measure, or of its notification to the plaintiff, or, in the absence thereof, of the day on which it came to the knowledge of the latter, as the case may be. The deadlines referred to above are extremely short, taking into account that in the CAN, an action for annulment can be filed within two years of the publication of the measure (see Article 20(1) TTJCAN). The Statute of the CJ-SICA does not provide any specific deadline even though this judicial body is also competent for actions for annulment (see Article 22 lit. c).

the validity of a legal act, any of the parties of the procedure may raise the question of its applicability before the CJM for the same reasons as in an action for annulment. This incidental plea in law is modelled after the objection of illegality enshrined in Article 277 TFEU and serves the same purpose, namely to allow parties to challenge the legality legal acts despite the fact that the time limit for an action for annulment may have expired or that the parties may have no legal standing to challenge these acts [14].

(b) *Action for failure to act.* An action for failure to act can be filed whenever the Parlasur, the CMC, the GMC, the CCM or the Secretariat should have failed to adopt a measure, in violation of an obligation derived from Mercosur law. As is the case in EU law, the draft protocol uses a broad terminology to define the requested measure (*medida; actividad*), which encompasses also non-legally binding acts³⁶. Active legitimacy is given to the Member States, the Parlasur, the Secretariat and individuals, in so far as they should be affected in their rights or legitimate interests. The action is admissible if the respective Mercosur body has failed to adopt a favourable decision within 30 days after the request to act has been submitted³⁷. Should the CJM consider the action founded, then it shall adopt a judgement based on the technical information available, containing the antecedents of the case, the explanations of the respondent body, as well as the form, modality and time-limit for the fulfilment of its obligation.

(c) *Action for infringement.* An important novelty in the procedural law of Mercosur, crucial to survey compliance by the Member States with their obligations derived from this integration system's legal order, is the introduction of the action for infringement, designed after the model in place in the *European Economic Area (EEA)*³⁸ and the CAN³⁹ [15]. However, contrary to the original model, the draft protocol foresees a number

of remarkable differences. For instance, it envisages that the action for infringement may not be only filed by, alternatively, a surveillance body (EU: *European Commission*; EFTA: *EFTA Surveillance Authority*; CAN: *Secretaría General*) or another Member State. The draft protocol goes in this respect beyond what is known in the other integration systems by extending this competence to additional actors such as Parlasur, the Secretariat and – subject to certain conditions, which shall be explained in detail – even to individuals. All these actors are presumed to act in the general interest of safeguarding the legality of State action.

The draft protocol follows the original European⁴⁰ and Andean⁴¹ model by distinguishing between a pre-litigation and a litigation stage. In the pre-litigation stage, the Secretariat shall confront the Member State with the alleged breach of Mercosur law in writing, to which the latter shall reply within a deadline of 30 days. After the receipt of the reply, the Secretariat shall submit a reasoned opinion containing an assessment of the alleged breach, with a deadline for reply of 15 days. If the opinion should conclude on a breach and the Member State were to persist in its behaviour, the Secretariat shall refer the matter to the CJM. Any other Member State affected is allowed to join the action in support of the Secretariat. While the original European model⁴² provides that that the executive body in charge of pursuing breaches of the integration system's law shall have discretion as to whether to take action against a Member State – a fact reflected in the wording of the respective provisions⁴³, – the draft protocol appears to use a stricter wording (*deberá iniciar, de forma inmediata, la acción de cumplimiento*), suggesting that the Secretariat might be obliged to bring an action before the CJM in all circumstances. Hereby, the draft protocol appears to lean more towards the Andean model, which leaves no other option to the

³⁶ In the EU, the duty to take a decision or other sort of action requested must give rise to an act that is capable of having legal effects. The nature of the legal effects required, however, is not always the same. It depends on the status of the party bringing the action. EU law distinguishes in Articles 265(1) and (3) TFEU between, on the one hand, actions filed by EU institutions as a result of a general failure by another institution to act according to obligations derived from the EU Treaties and, on the other hand, actions aimed at the adoption of a legal act ("other than a recommendation or an opinion") addressed to an individual. A similar concept can be found in Article 37(1) and (3) SCA for the EFTA pillar of the EEA ("any decision"), whereas the draft protocol on the CJM and CAN law do not appear to make such a distinction. Instead the respective provisions are framed in general terms, so as to encompass different types of measures or activities foreseen in integration law. This is similar in Eurasian law, as Article 39 of the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU merely refers to "omissions".

³⁷ The deadline is of 2 months in the EU (Article 265(2) TFEU) as well as in the EFTA pillar of the EEA (Article 37(2) SCA) and 30 days in the CAN (Article 37(2) TTJCAN).

³⁸ The EEA is the association between the EU and the EFTA States (excluding Switzerland), established in 1994 and comprising the Member States of both integration systems. Its objective is the extension of the internal market created by the EU to the participating EFTA States as well as cooperation in horizontal matters (see Case C-431/11, *United Kingdom v Council*, EU:C:2013:589, paras. 50).

³⁹ Contrary to the Eurasian system, which does no longer have any similar procedure to pursue infringements under the Treaty of the EurAsEU, in force since 1 January 2015. The dispute settlement mechanism of the former EurAsEC used still to foresee that the Eurasian Economic Commission could "notify" the Member State in question of the need to eliminate the violation of integration law within a "reasonable" period of time; if the latter failed to do so, the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission would then refer the issue to the Commission's Council. Only if the Member State ignored the Council's decision, the Board would refer the case to the Court of Justice of the EurAsEC.

⁴⁰ See Article 258(1) and (2) TFEU; Article 31(1) and (2) SCA.

⁴¹ See Article 23(1) and (2) TTJCAN.

⁴² See Case C-383/00 *Commission v Germany*, EU:C:2002:289, paras. 19; Case E-2/13, *Bentzen Transport*, [2013] EFTA Ct. Rep. 803, point 40.

⁴³ See Article 258(2) TFEU and Article 31(2) SCA (*[European Commission/ESA] may bring the matter before the [ECJ/EFTA Court]*).

Secretaría General than to investigate a breach and, once established, to launch infringement proceedings, ultimately referring the matter to the TJCAN⁴⁴.

As is the case in the EU and in the CAN, the action for infringement can be initiated by another Member State, provided that it first lodges a complaint before the respective executive body in charge of pursuing breaches. Under this procedure, the same deadlines for the pre-litigation stage referred to above apply. Should the Secretariat not refer the matter to the CJM within 60 days after having presented its reasoned opinion, the Member State may then bring the action by itself. It has this right as well in a situation, in which the Secretariat might not have submitted a reasoned opinion at all, for which a waiting period of 65 days after the filing of the complaint applies. Contrary to the provisions regulating the infringement procedure carried out by the Secretariat on its own motion, the Member State is awarded discretion (*el Estado Parte reclamante podrá iniciar la acción de incumplimiento*). The procedure described in this paragraph applies for any action for infringement initiated by Parlasur.

In deviation from the European and Andean model, the draft protocol grants individuals active legal capacity to pursue infringements of Mercosur in the event that their rights might have been violated. However, this remedy requires that individuals first undergo the procedure described above, which implies lodging a complaint before the Secretariat before being able to file an action. Remarkably, the use of this remedy expressly precludes the individual's right to call the competent national courts on grounds of a breach of Mercosur law by a Member State. While this provision, which is clearly inspired by CAN law⁴⁵, appears to prevent contradictory judicial decisions at supranational and national level, it is worth noting in this context that such a risk is rather unlikely. As prac-

tical experience shows, the risk that a national court might come to an interpretation and/or application of integration law is averted by the fact that national courts are usually entitled to submit a request for a preliminary ruling aimed at clarifying controversial questions of interpretation. Any judgement delivered by the CJM constitutes a suitable legal basis for individuals seeking reparation for damages before national courts on the basis of State liability for breach of Mercosur law. Here, Mercosur law leans more towards CAN law, which contains essentially the same provision⁴⁶, whereas in EU law, an ECJ judgement alone cannot be used as a legal basis for a claim based on State liability. It would rather require a judgement, either of the ECJ or a national court, concluding that the legal requirements for State liability established in the case-law of the ECJ – in particular, the existence of a “sufficiently serious breach” of a provision of EU law “conferring a right” on individuals – are met in the case in issue⁴⁷.

After a breach of Mercosur law has been established, the respective Member State has a deadline of 90 days to take the necessary measures to comply with the CJM judgement, unless a different deadline has been set. The draft protocol provides that the CJM judgement shall be binding upon all Member States and Mercosur bodies. As regards the measures available to CJM in case that the Member State should not have fulfilled this obligation, the draft protocol borrows from EU law⁴⁸ the faculty to impose a lumpsum or a penalty payment⁴⁹ [16; 17]. By doing this, the draft protocol clearly rejects the models currently in place in Mercosur⁵⁰ itself, CAN⁵¹ and SICA⁵², which allow Member States to resort to either compensatory measures – in the case of Mercosur – or countermeasures – in the case of CAN and SICA – against other Member States. While the first model is inspired by WTO law, the second one bears some similarity with the instrument of “lawful reprisal” known

⁴⁴See Article 23 TTJCAN (*La Secretaría General... formulará sus observaciones; emitirá un dictamen sobre el estado de incumplimiento; deberá solicitar...el pronunciamiento del Tribunal*). See also *Decision 623 of the Andean Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs regulating the pre-litigation stage of the infringement procedure*, implementing this provision, which contains instructions framed in terms leaving no discretion to the Secretaría General.

⁴⁵Article 31 in conjunction with Article 4 TTJCAN provides that individuals may call national courts in accordance with national rules in cases where Member States had failed to adopt the necessary measures to ensure compliance with CAN law, resulting in a breach of their individual rights.

⁴⁶See Article 30 TTJCAN.

⁴⁷The finding of a failure to fulfil obligations may potentially form the basis for liability on the part of the Member State concerned (see C-118/08, *Transportes Urbanos y Servicios Generales*, EU:C:2010:39). However, in accordance with the case-law, a Member State may incur liability only in the case of a “sufficiently serious breach” of EU law. A judgement finding a failure to fulfil obligations is in itself not enough (see Case C-445/06, *Danske Slagterier*, EU:C:2009:178). The requirement for a “sufficiently serious breach” does not square completely with the strict or objective nature of an action for failure to fulfil obligations, since the ECJ also takes other factors into account, such as whether or not the breach was intentional and whether any mistake of law was excusable.

⁴⁸See Article 260(2) TFEU.

⁴⁹An option not available in the dispute settlement mechanism foreseen in the EFTA pillar of the EEA, which must rather rely on ESA's readiness to launch subsequent infringement proceedings pursuant to Article 33 SCA, aimed at establishing that the respective EFTA State has failed to comply with the EFTA Court judgement (see [16]; see Case E-19/14, *ESA v Norway*, paras. 41). In the EurAsEU as well, while the decisions of its judicial body are deemed to be binding, there is no guaranteed enforcement. Article 114 of the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU provides that if there is no implementation within a given period of time, the aggrieved party can turn to the Supreme Council, or in other words, seek a high-level, political remedy (see [17]).

⁵⁰See Chapter IX of the PO.

⁵¹See Article 27 TTJCAN. The Secretaría General has developed certain criteria, accepted by the TJCAN, that sanctions must meet, such as the suitability of the measure to achieve the aimed objective of remedying the breach and its proportionality to the gravity of the breach (see *Comunicación SG-C/0.5/1206/2004* adopted in Case 52-AI-2002).

⁵²See Article 39(2) of the Statute of the CJ-SICA.

in public international law⁵³. It must be assumed that the drafters were aware of the risks that such a system has for the stability of an integration system. In fact, an integration system, which allows its Member States to resort to reprisal without addressing the precise origin of the dispute, will be undermined in the long term if the conflict escalates. A series of reprisal measures is unlikely to allow the integration system to reestablish the mutual trust shattered by the dispute. On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that certain Member States might refrain entirely from adopting authorized countermeasures out of fear of reprisals [18], ultimately putting into question the system of law enforcement. It is exceptionally, and only on the basis of reasons, that the CJM may impose sanctions in addition to a lump sum or a penalty payment, such as the restriction or the suspension of advantages granted to the Member State in breach of Mercosur law, including voting rights in Mercosur bodies. However, the draft protocol seems to take the concerns voiced above into account, as the CJM may refrain from imposing restrictions and rather opt for alternative – not specified – sanctions if the restrictions were to exacerbate the situation or to be inefficient.

The judgement delivered by the CJM shall be final and have effect of *res iudicata*. However, in order to prevent irreparable damages, any of the intervening parties may request the adoption of *interim* measures, such as the provisional suspension of the act allegedly in breach of Mercosur law. Furthermore, the CJM is entitled to review its own decision upon request by any of the parties on the basis of a decisive fact unknown at the time of the delivery of the judgement. The time limit for the submission of this request is of 90 days. This legal remedy aimed at striking a balance between legal certainty on the one hand and material justice on the other hand is clearly modeled after the legal provision laid down in Article 29 TTJCAN.

(d) *Preliminary ruling procedure*. An important novelty of the draft protocol is the introduction of the preliminary ruling procedure, designed after the model in place in the EU and the CAN. The CJM shall have jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings concerning the interpretation or validity of Mercosur law, upon request by the national courts. The draft protocol specifies that

a national court may bring the matter before the CJM on its own motion or upon request by any of the parties of the procedure⁵⁴. In the same way as in the EU and the CAN, the draft protocol distinguishes between the facultative and the obligatory referral, depending on whether there is a judicial remedy under national law against the national court's decision or not. Contrary to the European and the Andean model, the draft protocol extends the right to refer questions of interpretation or validity to other Mercosur bodies, namely Parlasur, the CMC, the GMC, the CCM and the Secretariat. From that perspective, the system envisaged appears to have borrowed characteristics of the one in place in the SICA, which provides for an "advisory opinion procedure" reserved to national courts⁵⁵ as well as for a "consultation procedure" available to other bodies⁵⁶, aimed both at obtaining an interpretation of the rules of the integration system⁵⁷.

Interestingly, even though the draft protocol states that a national court envisaging a referral to the CJM must suspend the national procedure, it explicitly acknowledges the national court's right to rule on the case even without having to wait for the CJM's preliminary ruling. This provision is derived from Andean law, which prescribes in Article 33 TTJCAN the suspension of the national procedure by the *iudex a quo* only in the case of an obligatory referral (paras. 2), whereas a referral does not have the effect of suspending the national procedure if it is merely facultative (paras. 1). Consequently, in the latter case, the national judge may adopt a decision resolving the dispute even before the supranational court has had the opportunity to rule on the questions submitted for interpretation⁵⁸ [19]. It is questionable whether this provision contributes to the efficiency of the system, given the considerable amount of resources often used in the framework of a single referral procedure.

It is worth noting in this context that the said provision of the draft protocol is likely to pose similar problems as in the legal situation, which existed in the EU before the latest reform of the ECJ's rules of procedure. Article 100 of the new *Rules of Procedure* recognizes the national court's right to withdraw its request for a preliminary ruling, however with certain restrictions. Ac-

⁵³ Reprisals in international law contexts were defined in the Naulilaa Case (Portugal v. Germany), 2 UN Reports of International Arbitral Awards 1012 (Portuguese-German Mixed Arbitral Tribunal, 1928): *A reprisal is an act of self-help ... by the injured state, responding – after an unsatisfied demand – to an act contrary to international law committed by the offending state... Its object is to effect Reparation from the offending state for the offense or a return to legality by the avoidance of further offenses.*

⁵⁴ The draft protocol is therefore more precise than European and Andean law as regards a possible "right" of the parties of the main proceedings to request a referral to the supranational court. The wording of Article 267(2) TFEU, Article 34(2) SCA and Article 33(1) TTJCAN is, on the contrary, rather neutral, suggesting that a referral constitutes the sole prerogative of the national judge, who shall determine its necessity for the resolution of the legal dispute. This interpretation has been confirmed in case-law (see Case C-104/10, *Kelly*, EU:C:2011:506, paras. 61, 64; Case E-18/11, *Irish Bank*, [2012] EFTA Ct. Rep. 592, paras. 55; Case 149-IP-2011, p. 8).

⁵⁵ See Article 22 lit. k of the Statute of the CJ-SICA.

⁵⁶ See Article 22 lit. e of the Statute of the CJ-SICA.

⁵⁷ As mentioned above, the Eurasian integration system has been deprived of its mechanism of preliminary ruling with the entry into force of Treaty on the EurAsEU. Instead, the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU, contained in Annex II to that treaty, provides in Article 46 for the competence to provide clarifications by means of "advisory opinions" to provisions of the treaty upon request of a Member State or an EurAsEU body.

⁵⁸ This is not the case in the SICA, where a suspension of the national procedure is considered to be a necessary step before any referral to the CJ-SICA.

cording to this provision, the withdrawal of a request may be taken into account until notice of the date of delivery of the judgement has been served on the interested persons referred to in Article 23 of the Statute. This provision must be interpreted as an attempt to strike a balance between the procedural autonomy, which every national court has, on the one hand and the interest in developing the case-law of the ECJ on the other hand, let alone in not wasting the precious personal and material resources invested in the procedure before the ECJ. In order to avoid any doubts regarding the binding nature of the judgement delivered by the CJM – what constitutes a turning point in the history of Mercosur procedural law, – the draft protocol states that the national court must apply the answer provided to the case brought before it⁵⁹. It further states that the Member States and the Mercosur bodies shall ensure that national courts strictly comply with the rules regulating the preliminary ruling procedure. The reference to Mercosur bodies in this context might be understood as an implicit statement that Member States are – despite the judicial independence awarded to judicial bodies under national constitutional law – not exempted from facing infringement proceedings for their courts' failure to comply with CJM case-law or with the duty to request preliminary rulings⁶⁰.

(e) *Arbitration*. The draft protocol borrows from the TTJCAN legal provisions conferring on the CJM jurisdiction to give judgement on the basis of an arbitration clause⁶¹. They do not entirely correspond to those laid down in the EU Treaties⁶² and are also considerably more detailed than the provisions regulating the competence of the CJ-SICA in arbitration matters⁶³. According to these provisions, the CJM shall have jurisdiction in disputes concerning the application or in-

terpretation of contracts or agreements concluded between Mercosur bodies and third parties if they agree. Furthermore, natural and legal persons may submit disputes to arbitration concerning the application or interpretation of private law contracts governed by Mercosur law. The CJM is entitled to rule on the basis of law or equity, depending on the choice of the parties.

(f) *Staff matters*. Last but not least, the CJM shall have jurisdiction in staff matters. By so doing, Mercosur follows the model established in the EU⁶⁴ and the CAN⁶⁵, which envisages the creation of a special jurisdiction, detached from the national court systems. The draft protocol distinguishes between officials and contract agents, who shall nonetheless be equally subject to the CJM's jurisdiction. The provisions specify that staff member shall have access to the CJM provided that the administrative legal remedies be exhausted. This implies *inter alia* lodging a complaint before the highest instance of the Mercosur body concerned. The principle of exhaustion of administrative legal remedies before the matter can be referred to the judicial body of the integration system is also foreseen in the EU⁶⁶.

(g) *Missing competences*. A comparative study of European and American supranational procedural law allows concluding that the draft protocol fails to provide for two essential types of procedures. One of them would be an action to be brought against Mercosur for non-contractual liability in the event that any of its institutions or servants has caused any damages to third parties, similar to the possibility foreseen both in European⁶⁷ and CAN law⁶⁸ [20; 21]. On the other hand, it is important noting that, at its current stage of development, Mercosur does not provide for such a possibility either [22], as is also the case of SICA⁶⁹. The other mis-

⁵⁹ Decisions adopted by the judicial bodies of integration systems upon referrals by national courts are binding with effect *inter partes* – despite the fact that they may have certain authority for the resolution of similar disputes – in the EU (see Case C-173/09, *Elchinov*, ECLI:EU:C:2010:581, paras. 29), CAN (see Case 156-IP-2011) and SICA (see Articles 3 and 39 Statute of the CJ-SICA; Case No. 1-27-05-2011, p. 5). Although advisory opinions of the EFTA Court do not have binding effect, they provide an interpretation of EEA law and therefore have certain authority. Consequently, ESA may launch infringement proceedings pursuant to Article 31 SCA should an EFTA State disregard this interpretation.

⁶⁰ The possibility for the surveillance body (European Commission/Secretaría General) to launch infringement proceedings in the event of a violation of the duty to refer questions concerning the interpretation of integration law is recognized in the case-law of the ECJ (see Case C-129/00, *Commission v Italy*, EU:C:2003:656) and the TJCAN (see Case 180-IP-2011, p. 10). This is not possible in the EFTA pillar of the EEA, as Article 34 SCA imposes no corresponding duty for a national court of last instance to request an advisory opinion (see Case E-18/11, *Irish Bank*, cited above, paras. 57, which is explained by the depth of integration under the EEA Agreement is less far-reaching than under the EU treaties as well as by the more partner-like relationship between the EFTA Court and the national courts of last resort.

⁶¹ See Article 38 TTJCAN.

⁶² See Articles 272-273 TFEU.

⁶³ See Article 22 lit. ch Statute of the CJ-SICA.

⁶⁴ See Articles 257 and 270 TFEU; Annex I to the Statute of the ECJ; Council Decision of 2 November 2004 establishing the European Union Civil Service Tribunal.

⁶⁵ See Article 40 TTJCAN and Articles 135-139 Statute of the TJCAN.

⁶⁶ See Case F-73/10, *Coedo Suárez v Council*, EU:F:2011:102.

⁶⁷ See Article 268 TFEU in conjunction with Article 340(2) TFEU as regards the non-contractual liability of the EU; See Article 46 SCA for the non-contractual liability of ESA in the EFTA pillar of the EEA.

⁶⁸ The non-contractual liability of CAN institutions is not explicitly foreseen in the Andean legal system. However, the TJCAN has developed this concept in its recent case-law based on the European integration experience (see Case 214-AN-2005; see, for a detailed analysis.

⁶⁹ This possibility is merely theoretical, as there is neither a legal basis in the treaties nor a precedent in the case-law of the CJ-SICA (see: Salazar Grande C. E., UlateChacón E. N. *Manual de Derecho Comunitario Centroamericano*. 2nd edition. Salvador, 2013. P. 254).

sing procedure would be one allowing the CJM to verify compatibility with Mercosur law of international agreements to be concluded by Mercosur with third States, as laid down in EU law⁷⁰. The introduction of this procedure seems very necessary, given the fact that Mercosur (and its Member States) often conclude agreements with third States, groups of States and international organizations, without carrying out a prior control of compatibility thereof with its legal order [23].

Types and legal effects of judicial decisions. Chapter II of the draft protocol deals with the legal effects emanating from judicial decisions. This concerns first of all the interim measures, which the CJM may order in specific circumstances, as has been already explained. Furthermore, the draft protocol refers to the binding and direct effect of judicial decisions, which shall be enforceable in the same way as any of a national court without other formality than verification of the authenticity of the decision by the CJM. From that viewpoint, this regulation is similar to Article 280 TFEU in conjunction with Article 299 TFEU, even though it rather appears to be modelled after Article 41 TTJCAN and Article 39 CJ-SICA. Again, the draft protocol relies on the evolution supranational law has experienced in Latin America over the years.

The draft protocol creates with the CJM a single jurisdiction – as is nowadays the case for the TJCAN, the CJ-SICA, the CJ-EurAsEU, as well as for the EFTA Court, or the ECJ in its early beginnings – with the consequence that its judgements are final and appeals are not admissible. However, for the sake of legal certainty, the draft protocol stipulates that the CJM shall be entitled to clarify or extend the scope of its judgements either on its own motion or upon request by any of the parties to the main proceedings within 30 days after its notification. This procedure appears to have as its model the procedure laid down in Article 38 of the Statute of the CJ-SICA, as the exact same wording of the provisions indicates. A similar procedure is foreseen in Article 92(1) TTJCAN, except that the latter provides for a time limit of 15 days. The true origin of all these procedures seems, however, to be in Article 43 of the ECJ Statute, which allows the parties of a procedure and/or an EU institution to request the inter-

pretation of judgements or orders of the ECJ and the General Court if the meaning of the judicial decision in question is in doubt. The resort to this procedure under EU law is however more generous than under the draft protocol and CAN law, as the time limit foreseen in the aforesaid provision is of two years.

The deviation from the current legal regime of panel decisions has been a major concern of the drafters, as the protocol reiterates the binding effect of all decisions adopted by the CJM upon the Member States, Mercosur bodies as well as natural and legal persons. It further states that these decisions shall be published in the *Official Journal of Mercosur*, unless decided otherwise.

Jurisdictional matters. As already mentioned, the draft protocol provides that the CJM shall have exclusive jurisdiction for disputes arising in connection with the legal system of Mercosur. This provision is the consequence of the negative experience made by Mercosur in the past and accordingly follows the European⁷¹ [24], the Andean and the Central American model, which foresee the exclusive jurisdiction of their respective dispute settlement mechanisms in Article 344 TFEU, Article 108(2) EEA, Article 42(1) TTJCAN⁷² and Article 3 of the Statute of the CJ-SICA⁷³.

In addition, the draft protocol provides that Member States and Mercosur bodies may decide to accept the CJM's jurisdiction in their relations with third States or groups of states. While this provision is clearly modelled after Article 42(2) TTJCAN, it is in line with EU law as well. It is worth recalling in this context that, as the ECJ has stated in its case-law concerning jurisdictional matters, an international agreement concluded with third States may confer new judicial powers on the ECJ provided that in so doing it does not change the essential character of the function of the ECJ as conceived in the EU Treaties⁷⁴. Both the CJ-SICA⁷⁵ and the CJ-EurAsEU⁷⁶ have been conferred similar competences.

The draft protocol borrows elements found in CAN law as regards the conferral of the necessary powers to fulfil its functions in practice. The legal provisions in question essentially replicate the competences foreseen in Articles 44 and 45 TTJCAN. These powers imply *inter alia* maintaining relations with the Member States and Mercosur bodies. Moreover, the draft pro-

⁷⁰ See Article 218(11) TFEU.

⁷¹ It is worth mentioning in this context that there is no similar provision in the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU (see also [3, p. 18]). It seems that the judicial body of the Eurasian integration process has lost its exclusive competence and that national jurisdictions will be allowed to interpret Eurasian law on their own right. This understanding appears to be in line with Article 47 of the Statute, which provides that *providing clarifications by the Court shall mean providing an advisory opinion and shall not deprive the Member States of the right for joint interpretation of international treaties*.

⁷² See Case 2-AI-97; Case 01-AN-2016.

⁷³ Whilst Article 3 of the Statute of the CJ-SICA merely states that the court shall have jurisdiction to settle disputes and that its decisions shall have binding effect on all States and bodies being part of the integration system as well as on individuals, this provision is commonly understood as referring to the court's exclusive jurisdiction. This is also unambiguously stated in the recitals (*Su competencia se establece como una competencia de atribución, con exclusión de cualquier otro Tribunal; Las facultades que se le atribuyen con carácter excluyente, son jurisdiccionales*).

⁷⁴ ECJ, Opinion 1/92, EEA II, ECLI:EU:C:1992:189, point 32; ECJ, Opinion 1/09, *European Patent Tribunal*, ECLI:EU:C:2011:123, point 75.

⁷⁵ See Article 22 lit. h of the Statute of the CJ-SICA.

⁷⁶ See Article 48 of the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU.

protocol states that the CJM shall coordinate meetings and actions with the highest judicial authorities of the Member States with a view to promote the knowledge and the development of Mercosur law as well as its uniform application.

General provisions. As in any other international legal system, the draft protocol is expected to provide for a regulation concerning the linguistic regime. By declaring Spanish and Portuguese official languages in all legal proceedings, the draft protocol keeps the linguistic regime of the dispute settlement mechanism currently in place in Mercosur.

While the CJM is supposed to replace the current dispute settlement mechanism, the draft protocol clarifies that the provisions of the PO shall remain applicable to pending legal proceedings. This regulation confirms the view that the draft protocol's objective is by no means to set up an entirely new integration system with a distinct legal personality. The legislative amendments must rather be construed as meaning that they only concern Mercosur's dispute settlement mechanism. The situation in Mercosur can therefore not be compared to the evolution experienced in the Eurasian space, in which a distinct Court of Justice has been created with the establishment of the *Eurasian Economic Union (EurAsEU)* on 1 January 2015⁷⁷ [25; 26]. Even though the *Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)* preceded this integration system until its dissolution on the said date and had a court of justice of its own, which shared the same premises, it is not possible to speak of a legal succession between these two international organizations. Accordingly, the CJ-EurAsEU as such does not have jurisdiction for disputes concerning the legal system of the EurAsEC. Despite the considerable repercussions of the reform of its dispute settlement mechanism, which might entail a transformation into a supranational legal system, the amendments remain confined within the same integration system.

The draft protocol, once approved, will be a separate legal instrument of public international law, which will nonetheless constitute part of the Mercosur legal *acquis*. In line with the CJM's exclusive jurisdiction in Mercosur law matters, the draft protocol provides that any State acceding to the TA shall accede *ipso iure* to the protocol. Conversely, any withdrawal from the protocol implies the withdrawal from the TA.

A similar provision can be found in Article 51 of the *Agreement between the EFTA States on the establishment of a Surveillance Authority and a Court of Justice (SCA)* for the EEA.

Transitional provisions. Last but not least, the draft protocol contains provisions, which regulate the transition from the current dispute settlement regime to the new one. They state time limits for the first appointment of judges, the completion of the establishment of the CJM, the adoption of its Statute and Rules of Procedure, as well as the adoption of the regulation establishing a system of own financial resources.

Sources of integration law. The core duty of an integration system's judicial body is, first of all, to settle disputes between the various stakeholders. Apart from that, it will have to contribute to the evolution of the legal order created by the founding treaties in order to allow the integration system as a whole to attain its objectives. The importance of the latter task is owed to the fact that integration law, firstly, is fragmentary by nature and, secondly, has its own principles and rules, which transcend the categories known from national and public international law. Consequently, achieving this task will require the development and use of a specific methodology proper to the respective legal order. It can be observed by means of a comparative study that the methodology employed finds different expressions from one integration system to another, depending on the characteristics of the sources of law⁷⁸. If Mercosur is meant to evolve from an integration system of an intergovernmental format into a supranational one, it will be crucial to establish first the sources of law, which the CJM will have to apply.

It is worth noting in this context that the draft protocol provides in its preamble that the CJM shall "interpret" and "state" integration law, however without referring to the sources of Mercosur law, contrary to what had been the approach to this date under Article 1 PO. Due to the fact that the PO – regulating the arbitration system currently in place – is likely to be repealed after the draft protocol has entered into force, it will be necessary to rely on Article 41 of the *Protocol of Ouro Preto (POP)*, with lists up these sources. Mercosur would therefore take a different systematic approach than CAN, EFTA and EurAsEU, which specifically indicate in the founding legal instruments of their respec-

⁷⁷ The EurAsEU is an integration system established in 2015, comprising Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Its objectives are the establishment of a customs union and a single economic space to guarantee the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour among its Member States.

⁷⁸ A few examples are the doctrine of the "complementonecesario" in CAN law, designed to compensate the absence of legal acts having the specific characteristics of EU Directives (see Cases 90-IP-2008, p. 11 and 88-IP-2011, p. 15); the principle of primacy, designed to guarantee the effective application of EU (see Cases C-399/11, *Melloni*, EU:C:2013:107, paras. 59 and C-409/06, *Winner Wetten*, EU:C:2010:503, paras. 69), CAN (see Cases 044-IP-2013 and 22-IP-2012), Mercosur (see Cases TPR, Opinión Consultiva No. 1/2009, paras. 17 and conclusion 2; No. 1/2008, paras. 30, 31 and 34, conclusion 2), SICA (see CCJ, Res. 11 hrs. 27/08/01, *Nicaragua v Honduras*, cons. V.; CCJ, Res. 10 hrs. 24/5/95, Opinión Consultiva SGSICA; CCJ, Res. 10:25 de 20/10/95, Opinión Consultiva. SG SICA) and Eurasian (CJ-EurAsEC, judgement of 5 September 2012, Russian OJSC "Ugolnaya Kompaniya Yuzhny Kuzbass") law; the principles of substantive (see E-2/06, *ESA v Norway* [2007] EFTA Ct. Rep. 164, paras. 41), effect-related (see E-1/01, *Einarsson* [2002] EFTA Ct. Rep. 1) and procedural homogeneity (see Case E-18/10, *ESA v Norway* [2011] EFTA Ct. Rep. 202, paras. 26) in EEA law, designed to guarantee the uniformity of EEA law despite the division in an EU and an EFTA pillar.

tive judicial bodies the law to be applied for the resolution of disputes⁷⁹. As a matter of comparison, it should be mentioned that the founding legal instruments of the respective judicial bodies of SICA and EU merely refer to their respective forms of integration law in general, with a catalogue of legal act types contained in separate legal instruments, respectively in Article 9 of the *Reglamento de los Actos Normativos del SICA* and in Article 288 TFEU.

It must be concluded from the above that the CJM would simply “inherit” the old set of rules, originally designed for an intergovernmental system, along with the daunting assignment to infuse elements of supranationality into Mercosur through its own case-law. It can be reasonably expected that Mercosur will undergo gradual stages of development as similar integration systems elsewhere in the world. Having said this, it is common to almost all legal orders, in which the aforementioned judicial bodies operate, that they view themselves as *sui generis* and autonomous, distinct from national and public international law, either if they are to be classified as “community law”⁸⁰ or as being at an “intermediate stage”⁸¹. Only the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU raises questions as regards the precise nature of Eurasian law⁸², as it explicitly refers to public international law as one of its sources⁸³.

Conclusions

The draft protocol on the creation of CJM constitutes a compilation of legal provisions inspired by the legal orders of other integration systems in both America and Europe. While the influence of CAN and, to a less extent, of SICA is palpable, it is worth noting that most provisions ultimately go back to the legal order created by the EU. This concerns, for the most part, the system of procedures and remedies, which has been adopted with only few modifications. The same applies to the system of financial penalties for breach of integration law, what might make of Mercosur the sole integration system in America to put in place such a mechanism of legal enforcement. However, the fact that the draft protocol partially sticks to a system of

countermeasures in order to ensure enforcement, as is the case in CAN and SICA, indicates that the drafters were still cautious as regards the possible acceptance of a system of financial penalties by the Member States, which are called upon to approve the draft protocol.

The dispute settlement mechanism envisaged is meant to replace a system of arbitration, which has become obsolete for an integration system such as Mercosur with the ambitious objective of creating a common market comprising the largest economies in South America. The tendency goes clearly towards the adoption of supranational features, leaving behind the intergovernmental past. Safeguards such as the independence in financial matters as well as regards the appointment of judges shall ensure that the future CJM will operate efficiently, shielded from any possible intervention by national governments. The ultimate purpose consists in the consolidation of the Mercosur legal order as one distinct from national and international law, which shall evolve into community law. This aspiration can be deduced from the draft protocol and from the diverse decisions adopted by the TPR, which essentially acknowledge that Mercosur law is still at an early stage of development. It further follows from the recitals to the preamble and the explanations attached to the draft protocol that the drafters hoped for more professionalism in the exercise of judicial functions, liable to contribute to an improvement of the quality of Mercosur case-law. Unfortunately, at this stage, certain panel and TPR decisions reveal a lack of legal creativity, with solutions often “imported” from the findings of other supranational courts. The involvement of permanent judges shall hopefully help the CJM develop its own case-law, derived from an inward and rigorous analysis of Mercosur law. Ultimately, depending on the success of the CJM, Mercosur law might advance to becoming an additional source of supranational integration law worldwide, contributing to a more authentic “judicial dialogue”⁸⁴ with the TJCAN⁸⁵ [27] and other supranational courts, instead of remaining confined to the role of the receptor, which processes and transposes foreign case-law (mainly from CAN⁸⁶ and EU) to Mercosur’s reality.

⁷⁹Article 1 TTJCA; Article 1 lit. a SCA; Article 50 of the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU.

⁸⁰This is the case of the EU (see Cases C-26/62, Van Gend en Loos, EU:C:1963:1; C-6/64, Costa v E.N.E.L., EU:C:1964:66); of the CAN (see Cases 2-AI-97; Case 3-AI-96; 2-IP-90); and of the SICA (CCJ, Decisions 4-1-12-96; No. 05-08-97).

⁸¹This is the case of the EEA (see Case E-7/97, *Sveinbjörnsdóttir* [1998] EFTA Ct. Rep. 127, paras. 59; E-4/01 Karlsson [2002] EFTA Ct. Rep. 240, paras. 25) and of Mercosur (TPR, Decisions No. 1/2005; No. 1/2007; No. 1/2009).

⁸²Certain aspects, such as the regulatory competence of the EurAsEU Commission – its executive body – and the supremacy of its Customs Code over national law, suggest that it combines supranational and intergovernmental elements.

⁸³Article 50 of the Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU reads *In the exercise of justice, the Court shall apply: 1) the generally recognised principles and regulations of international law (paragraph 1)... 4) the international custom as evidence of the general practice accepted as a rule of law.*

⁸⁴Term coined for the continuous exchange between the ECJ and the EFTA Court, commonly understood as a joint effort of both European courts to synchronise their case-law with a view to ensure that the rules of the EEA Agreement, which are identical in substance to those of the EU Treaties, are interpreted uniformly, in line with the principle of homogeneity (see Cases C-286/02, *Bellio*, EU:C:2004:212 and E-1/04, *Fokus Bank*, [2004] EFTA Ct. Rep., 11).

⁸⁵See [27], concerning the proposal consisting of creating a legal mechanism aimed at establishing a link between CAN and Mercosur, which would make their legal orders compatible with each other. The ultimate objective would be to create an integrated “South American Economic Area”, in which both, TJCAN and a future CJM would play a crucial role in the interpretation of the common integration law.

⁸⁶See Case TPR, 1/2005, paras. 4, 5, 10.

The draft protocol can be seen as an answer to the long debated question as to whether Mercosur could evolve into a supranational legal order by its own means, relying exclusively on the efforts undertaken by its dispute settlement bodies and the case-law produced, or rather by the creation of a judicial body with far-reaching competences, such as ECJ, EFTA Court and TJCAN. Experience has shown that an arbitration system cannot deliver the expected results, due to its lack of continuity, professionalism and long-term perspective. Neither could be expected that powerful Member States would relinquish their bargaining power

in negotiations in favour of a more balanced system, which promotes the formal equality between Member States for the sake of the stability of integration process. Against this backdrop, the creation of a supranational court would constitute a radical turning point in Mercosur's history. Eventually, such a step might provide *stimuli* for other integration systems around the world to follow the example. As can be seen in the case of the CJ-EurAsEU, integration does not necessarily entail a continuous increase in the competence of judicial bodies but sometimes even the loss thereof⁸⁷ [28].

The way ahead

Although five years have passed since Parlasur submitted the draft protocol for approval, the idea of establishing the CJM has not been given up. On the contrary, the election of a new government in Argentina has sparked hopes for a consideration of this project by the CMC. Accordingly, on 14 March 2016, the delegation of Paraguay at Parlasur submitted a note to the President of this body, inviting him to address again the CMC with a view to urge this body to study

the legislative project. Due to Uruguay's traditionally positive stance on this matter – Uruguay had already in 1994 suggested the creation of a court of justice⁸⁸ – there is the hope that the presidency of this Member State at the CMC will be favourable to the project. Despite the overwhelming number of arguments presented by officials and legal scholars, the only certain fact at the moment is that the Member States will have the last word in this issue.

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⁸⁷ The Statute of the CJ-EurAsEU shows a clear intention to limit its competences and authority. A few examples are the already mentioned abolishment of the mechanism or preliminary ruling, the authorisation of joint interpretations by the Member States themselves (Article 47), the prohibition on the CJ-EurAsEU to vest additional competences to the bodies of the integration system (Article 42) or to create new legal provisions, including in national legislation, and the pre-trial requirement (Article 43).

⁸⁸ On that occasion, Uruguay had submitted a draft document on the establishment of a court of justice, produced by the National Commission of Lawyers, which had started its work in 1992 with a seminary organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, to which *Pierre Pescatore* (ECJ) and *Fernando Uribe Restrepo* (TJCAN) had been invited.

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