

## Regional Integration Projects in Venezuela's Foreign Policy under the Presidency of Nicolas Maduro (2013-2018)

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### ABSTRACT

**The purpose of the research paper** is to highlight the development, changes, and results that occurred in Venezuela's regional integration during President Nicolas Maduro's first term of office (2013-2018).

**The novelty of the research paper** is in a comprehensive analysis of Venezuela's regional policy within the framework of the leading integration associations ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR, which, according to Hugo Chavez's plan, were supposed to turn the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela into a regional leader in Latin America. Instead, N. Maduro was unable to take advantage of his predecessor's foreign policy successes and lost the opportunities he had planned.

**Conclusions.** Taking into consideration the theoretical and ideological foundations of Venezuela's foreign policy, the conclusion can be made that the regional vector of foreign policy has remained one of the focal points for President Nicolas Maduro. Thanks to its resources and ideological dominance, the country could rightfully claim regional leadership, as it united the countries of the region on the wave of anti-Americanism, initiated many integration movements, and made most countries in the region dependent on its energy supplies and credits.

'Pockets of resistance' to US expansion in Latin America and regional integration were concentrated in three organizations where Venezuela was one of the founders or key players: ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR.

The economic and political crisis that hit Venezuela sharply raised the question of the continuity of the 'Bolivarian Project', which affected the change in the state's priorities, including in the international arena. N. Maduro had to focus on the country's internal problems.

In the regional integration policy of Venezuela during N. Maduro's first term of office, we can distinguish two qualitative periods: 1. 2013-2015, the time of relatively successful implementation of the regional integration course, and, 2. 2016-2018, the decline and actual collapse of the regional vector of Venezuela's foreign policy. It was just the loss of democratic tendencies in Maduro's domestic policy that led to the loss of regional leadership and global stature.

The three integration projects analyzed by the authors started losing their credibility and effectiveness during 2013-2018, which happened mostly due to the crisis in Venezuela. CELAC and UNASUR de facto ceased their activities, and ALBA remained the only instrument of N. Maduro's regional influence.

**Keywords:** regional integration, Venezuela, Latin America, Nicolas Maduro, international organization, ALBA, CELAC, UNASUR

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Venezuela has increasingly attracted the attention of the international community and aroused general interest. This was primarily because of the emergence of a strong and charismatic Venezuelan leader, Hugo Chavez, on the political scene. His foreign policy, which was based on anti-Americanism, regional cooperation, and the use of the country's energy potential, dramatically affected the international situation and the balance of power in Latin America.

In April 2013, the world's attention was once again focused on Venezuela. After the death of Hugo Chavez, Nicolas Maduro Moros, who had previously served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in Chavez's government and positioned himself as a 'faithful follower' of Bolivarianism, was elected president. The new leader of the country continued the political line of his predecessor, but his lack of charisma, in contrast to that of Hugo Chavez, and no very high political authority within the country and in the international arena, prevented him from solving a number of social, economic, and political problems

and led to an aggravation of the political crisis in the country. The latter affected both the internal situation in Venezuela and the country's foreign policy.

*The purpose of the research* is to show the development, changes, and results that occurred in Venezuela's regional integration during the first term of President Nicolas Maduro (2013-2018).

## Literature Review

Throughout the whole term of Nicolas Maduro's presidency, his personality has attracted the interest of researchers from various countries. The first studies trying to comprehend the achievements and prospects of Venezuela's foreign policy under N. Maduro appeared in 2014 and have been published in many scientific and popular scientific publications since then. Almost 100% of them are the studies of political scientists who aimed not so to summarize and comprehensively uncover Venezuela's foreign policy but to analyze the present situation and predict the development of a particular segment of the country's foreign policy course.

Among Latin American researchers of Venezuela's foreign policy, the greatest attention was paid to Venezuela's triumphant accession to Mercosur in 2012, which created a serious basis for N. Maduro's regional integration course. Juana E. Perozo Álvarez and Diana B. Perozo Álvarez consider that Venezuela would not only strengthen the bloc but also turn it into the fifth largest economy in the world thanks to its energy resources<sup>1</sup>. In turn, Francisco Bracho Espinel, while positively assessing Venezuela's joining the Mercosur, notes that the country will need to revise its public policy and strategy to overcome serious imbalances in the economy compared to other members of the bloc<sup>2</sup>. The general tendencies of Latin American unity at different stages of its development, integration concepts and their comparison are presented in their monograph by Jorge Villasmil Espinoza and Ítalo Vinicio Jiménez Idrovo<sup>3</sup>.

It is also necessary to mention the thorough research papers by Colombian-Venezuelan Professor Victor Mijares. His research interests are quite broad and cover a variety of issues<sup>4</sup>. In the context of regional integration, the studies devoted to the UNASUR<sup>5</sup> crisis are of great interest, as well as a generalized analysis of the reasons for the collapse of UNASUR and the role of Venezuela under N. Maduro in that process<sup>6</sup>. The authors point out that the collapse of a regional integration organization is not a typical phenomenon for Latin America and requires careful study by political science.

The Russian school of Latin American studies provides more comprehensive research on the place and role of Venezuela in regional integration processes. The latter is represented by the studies of Andrey Budaev, Olesya Demyasheva, Ekaterina Zolotova, Natalia Nunez-Sarantseva, Anton Boreyko, Alim Suleymanov, Alla Posashkova, Denis Kuznetsov, Zbigniew Ivanovsky, Dmitry Rosenthal, and others.

The most interesting is the so-called 'Bolivarian integration' in the form of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). A. Budaev considers ALBA to be the main supporting structure of Venezuela's 'soft power'<sup>7</sup>. O. Demyasheva analyzes the results of ALBA's activities in the times of Hugo Chavez and studies the initiatives and projects that the members of the Alliance managed to implement, as well as the problems and difficulties that are hindering its development<sup>8</sup>. E. Zolotova shows Venezuela's economic cooperation within the Bolivarian Alliance, noting that

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<sup>1</sup> Perozo Álvarez J.E., Perozo Álvarez D.B. Proceso de integración de Venezuela al MERCOSUR // Cuestiones Políticas. 2013. Vol. 29. No 50, enero-junio. P. 73-95.

<sup>2</sup> Espinel Francisco Bracho. Venezuela en el MERCOSUR: retos y oportunidades // Cuestiones Políticas. 2013. Vol. 29. No 50, enero-junio. P. 49-72.

<sup>3</sup> Villasmil Espinoza J.J., Jiménez Idrovo Í.V. El discurso de la unidad americana en tres tiempos: independencia, organización nacional, antiimperialismo. Zulia-Maracaibo, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Mijares V.M. Venezuela's Post Chávez Foreign Policy. Is there a Maduro Doctrine? // Americas Quarterly. 2015. Winter. P. 74-81; Romero C.A., Mijares V.M. From Chávez to Maduro: Continuity and Change in Venezuelan Foreign Policy // Contexto Internacional. 2016. Vol. 38, Number 1. P. 191-227. DOI: 10.1590/S0102-8529.2016380100005

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann A.M., Mijares V.M., Schenoni L. Die Krise in Venezuela – Prüfstein für die UNASUR // GIGA Focus Lateinamerika. 2015. № 3 (May). S. 1-8. URL: [www.giga-hamburg.de/de/publikationen/11569675-krise-venezuela-pruefstein-unasur](http://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/publikationen/11569675-krise-venezuela-pruefstein-unasur)

<sup>6</sup> Mijares V.M., Nolte D. Regionalismo posthegemónico en crisis. ¿Por qué la Unasur se desintegra? // Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica. 2018. Vol. 18: Núm. 3. P. 105-112; Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR: An Eclectic Analytical Perspective of its Disintegration // Colombia Internacional. 2022. Number III. P. 83-109. DOI: 10.7440/colombiant111.2022.04

<sup>7</sup> Будаев А.В. «Мягкая сила» Боливарианской Республики Венесуэла: мифы и реальность // Государственное управление. Электронный вестник. 2015. Вып. 50 (июнь). С. 89-118.

<sup>8</sup> Демяшева О.П. Успехи и трудности Боливарианского альянса // Латинская Америка. 2015. № 2. С. 37-47.

“Nicolas Maduro cannot support the oil projects of his predecessor Hugo Chavez in ALBA”, which significantly weakens the organization<sup>9</sup>. N. Nunez-Sarantseva<sup>10</sup> studies the fundamental principles of functioning, results, problems, and prospects of ALBA’s development and assesses them positively. A. Boreyko<sup>11</sup>, without deepening into the history of the organization’s development, suggests the Venezuelan authorities apply to international experts for assistance in developing ways out of the crisis. Almost all the analyzed research papers were prepared and published in the first years of N. Maduro’s presidency and uncovered that period only in passing, focusing on the era of Hugo Chavez. There is also no comprehensive overview of the organization’s development over the past decade.

Another important integration organization, in which Venezuela plays a key role, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños; CELAC), is also under research in Russian historiography. A. Suleymanov highlights the peculiarities of its functioning, the history of its creation and gives a brief overview of the key decisions taken at the summits of 2013-2017. The researcher concludes that although there are shortcomings in the work of the organization, in general, CELAC plays a positive role in the region and has certain prospects<sup>12</sup>.

The general trends of Latin American integration in the period under study are analyzed by D. Kuznetsov<sup>13</sup>, A. Posashkova<sup>14</sup>, Z. Ivanovsky and D. Rosenthal<sup>15</sup> in their publications. D. Kuznetsov briefly analyzes the evolution of integration ideas in the region, as well as the main features of integration through the prism of regional organizations UNASUR, ALBA, MERCOSUR, CELAC, etc. as of 2014. A. Posashkova, using the information on the mentioned organizations, characterizes the impact of the Venezuelan political crisis on regional integration. The researcher proves that the crisis in Venezuela actually abolishes all the achievements of Hugo Chavez in creating an alternative regional integration within UNASUR and CELAC, and ALBA is rapidly losing its credibility. The study by Z. Ivanovsky and D. Rosenthal summarizes the sad results of the systemic crisis in Venezuela, which has destroyed not only integration associations in the Latin American region but also moved N. Maduro’s regime from the top positions of the regional leader.

Some Ukrainian scholars are studying this issue as well, among them N. Havrylova and I. Kokurina, R. Chuprin and Y. Lenda, and Tetiana Bessarab. The studies by N. Havrylova and I. Kokurina<sup>16</sup>, R. Chuprin and Y. Lenda<sup>17</sup> show in general Venezuela’s participation and achievements in regional integration associations in the first years of N. Maduro’s presidency amid the deepening economic crisis in the country. All the authors positively assess Maduro’s first steps towards deepening regional integration. T. Bessarab<sup>18</sup> shows the phenomenon of regionalism on the Latin American continent in the context of regional security through the prism of the activities of MERCOSUR, UNASUR, and CELAC, but Venezuela’s place in regional associations is defined in passing and in a general context.

The Ukrainian study guide edited by N. Havrylova deserves special attention, as it not only summarizes Venezuela’s foreign policy vectors until 2019 but also gives an outline of integration

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<sup>9</sup> Золотова Е.В. Роль Боливарианской Республики Венесуэла в альянсе АЛБА // Наука о человеке: гуманитарные исследования. 2015. № 2 (20). С. 174-178.

<sup>10</sup> Нуньес-Саранцева Н.Н. Особенности функционирования и перспективы развития Боливарианского альянса // Латинская Америка. 2017. № 1. С. 22-37.

<sup>11</sup> Борейко А.В. АЛБА на словах и на деле: идеология и практика боливарианского альянса // Ибероамериканские тетради – Cuadernos Iberoamericanos. 2019. № 3. С. 50-53. DOI: 10.46272/2409-3416-2019-3-50-53

<sup>12</sup> Сулейманов А.В. CELAC – новый механизм диалога в Латино-Карибской Америке // Латинская Америка. 2017. № 9. С. 49-60.

<sup>13</sup> Кузнецов Д.А. Особенности и перспективы латиноамериканской интеграции на современном этапе // Ибероамериканские тетради – Cuadernos Iberoamericanos. 2015. № 3. С. 37-49. DOI: 10.46272/2409-3416-2015-3-37-49

<sup>14</sup> Посашкова А.В. Венесуэльский кризис как угроза региональной интеграции в Латинской Америке // Латинская Америка. 2018. № 3. С. 56-66.

<sup>15</sup> Ивановский З.В., Розенталь Д.М. Венесуэла: политическое противостояние и мировое сообщество // Вестник Московского университета. 2020. Сер. 25: Международные отношения и мировая политика. № 2. С. 71-110.

<sup>16</sup> Гаврилова Н.В., Кокуріна І.В. Зовнішньополітичний курс Венесуели за президентства Ніколаса Мадуро // Вісник Маріупольського державного університету. Серія: Історія. Політологія. 2015. Вип. 13-14. С. 222-229.

<sup>17</sup> Чупрін Р.В., Ленда Ю.В. Венесуела в системі геополітичних відносин в Південній Америці на початку XXI ст. // Наукові праці Чорноморського державного університету імені Петра Могили комплексу «Києво-Могилянська академія». Серія: Політологія. 2016. Т. 284, Вип. 272. С. 70-75.

<sup>18</sup> Бессараб Т. Особливості латиноамериканського регіоналізму в контексті регіональної безпеки // Humanitarian vision. 2016. Vol. 2, Num. 1. С. 1-8.

processes in Latin America, which gives a general notion of the formation and development of regional integration through the prism of international organizations<sup>19</sup>. Unfortunately, this work is characterized by the shortcomings inherent in such works: abstract generalizations, lack of scientific apparatus and scientific novelty.

As we can see, this issue is being studied by many scholars nowadays. This is because of Venezuela's active entry into the political arena and its increasing role as a regional leader, as well as its energy resource potential, thanks to which it has a significant influence in the twenty-first century, especially in the Latin American region. Instead, both the foreign policy course of the period of Nicolas Maduro's presidency in general and its regional integration aspect have been studied insufficiently in the historical and political science literature, and require generalization from the point of view of historical science and the holistic view of the problem with appropriate summarization.

#### **REGIONAL INTEGRATION AS A KEY FOREIGN POLICY VECTOR OF VENEZUELA IN THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

The regional dimension of foreign policy has become crucial for Venezuela in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since Nicolás Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chavez, achieved the greatest success in the international arena just at the regional level. He managed to become the unofficial leader of the region. One of the main victories in the field of regional policy was the blocking of the American project of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), when in December 2005 Venezuela, along with Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, vetoed its implementation.

The support of the masses at the national level gave President Hugo Chavez the opportunity to take more decisive action in the international arena. Foreign policy became a reflection of domestic policy and could be summarized into the following positions:

- 1) intensification of integration processes in the Latin American and the Caribbean regions;
- 2) support for the UN as the final arbiter on various issues;
- 3) achieving a leading position in the protection of the countries of the Global South in the face of the Global North;
- 4) increasing Venezuela's role in regional and international organizations;
- 5) pressure on the situation on the energy market, within the framework of OPEC, etc;
- 6) anti-Americanism and drift towards Cuba<sup>20</sup>.

The main goal of Latin American regionalism was to ensure greater independence from the United States. Building a new regional institutional architecture was one of Venezuela's most important tactical goals, as noted in the provisions of the last strategic document of the Chavez era, the Plan de la Patria (National Plan), which proclaimed Venezuela's liberation from "international mechanisms of imperial domination". Venezuela's effort to delink from the inter-American structure built around the Organization of American States (OAS) was a major example, as has been Venezuela's consistent challenges to and denunciations of the inter-American system of human rights<sup>21</sup>.

It was Hugo Chavez, who was the main initiator and engine of political regional integration. In 2004, together with the Cuban government, Hugo Chavez established the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) (until June 2009 – Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas)<sup>22</sup>, which was later joined by Bolivia, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Ecuador (withdrew membership in 2018), and Honduras (withdrew membership in January 2010 after a coup d'état)<sup>23</sup>. The basis of this association was the PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement, according to which Venezuela assured that it would supply oil to the participating countries on mutually beneficial preferential terms. Apart from the ALBA countries, some other Caribbean states joined that agreement<sup>24</sup>. Chavez played a key role in that project, and the establishment of ALBA gave reason to discuss the beginning of a 'left turn' in

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<sup>19</sup> Гаврилова Н.В. (ред.). Зовнішня політика країн Латинської Америки: навчальний посібник. Маріуполь: МДУ, 2020. С. 16-39, 250-278.

<sup>20</sup> Емельянов А.И. Латиноамериканский цивилизационный проект Венесуэлы // Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Общественные науки. 2016. № 1 (764). С. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Mijares V.M. Venezuela's Post Chávez Foreign Policy. Is there a Maduro Doctrine? // Americas Quarterly. 2015. Winter. P. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Agreement for the ALBA application // ALBA. URL: <http://alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/agreement-alba-application>

<sup>23</sup> Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America // Encyclopedia Britannica. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bolivarian-Alliance-for-the-Peoples-of-Our-America>

<sup>24</sup> PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement // University of New Mexico. UNM Digital Repository. URL: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=la\\_energy\\_policies](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=la_energy_policies)

Latin America, and the coming to power of leftist presidents in Argentina and Brazil was the result of the inclusion of two leading countries of South America in that process<sup>25</sup>. It was ALBA that became a radical anti-American regional project that embodied most of the Venezuelan leader's integrationist ideas.

Hugo Chávez also initiated the establishment of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños; CELAC), which was formed in 2010 based on the Rio Group (G-Rio) and the Latin American and Caribbean Summits on Integration and Development. The organization includes all the states of the Western Hemisphere, except for the United States and Canada<sup>26</sup>.

The Venezuelan President also was one of the founders of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which united all 12 countries of the South American continent (member states of the Southern Common Market – known as Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay), the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela), as well as Chile, Guyana, and Suriname). The organization was established on May 23, 2008, as a result of the signing of the Constitutive Treaty of the South American Union of Nations in Brasília. UNASUR is the successor of the South American Community of Nations (Comunidad Sudamericana de Naciones; CSN), which was established when 12 South American leaders signed the Cuzco Declaration in the city of Cuzco, Peru, in 2004<sup>27</sup>.

According to Argentine analyst Andrés Serbin, those three organizations were the “centers of resistance” to US expansion in Latin America, since neither the United States nor Canada is the member of these organizations, and “the United States has had difficulties in establishing an effective dialogue with them, both because of their preference for bilateral dialogue and because of the blocs’ open antagonism to the United States after the failed attempt to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) (Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas (ALCA)) in the 1990s”<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, during the presidency of Hugo Chávez, Venezuela placed great emphasis on regional direction, with the main goal being to achieve leadership positions in the region and actually attach as many countries as possible to itself and its economy. The ties, especially political ones, between Latin American states significantly strengthened, despite the fact that they had not developed a unified and consistent regional integration agenda. The region failed to overcome the split and lack of consolidated institutions, due to which the priority of national interests and protection of sovereignty remained stronger than supranational agreements<sup>29</sup>.

After coming to power, President N. Maduro immediately emphasized that all agreements and obligations of Venezuela within regional organizations would be preserved and respected. However, according to political scientist V. Mijares, H. Chávez left Maduro with an ambiguous legacy. The new president's ability to exploit the institutional advantages created by his predecessor was hamstrung by the increasingly problematic oil economy both at home and overseas. The massive public spending that served as a central tool in Chávez's political arsenal is no longer available to Maduro because of the weakening of oil revenues. Therefore, the Maduro foreign policy doctrine can be summarized as the change from proactively seeking international influence to a policy of reacting to international conditions – and a need to attend to the economic needs of the country and his political weaknesses within *chavismo* and vis-à-vis the opposition<sup>30</sup>.

N. Maduro continued to rely on the system of alliances and unions created by H. Chavez. Despite the general worsening of Venezuela's situation, ALBA subsidies via PetroCaribe continued. As V. Mijares correctly states: “These instruments are not only fundamental to Venezuela's ideological principle of international solidarity, they are also the regime's tools of power projection, especially in the main sub-region of historical Venezuelan influence: the Caribbean Basin”<sup>31</sup>.

## **BOLIVARIAN ALLIANCE FOR THE PEOPLES OF OUR AMERICA (ALBA)**

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<sup>25</sup> Семенов В.Л. Финал «Боливарианского проекта»? // Латинская Америка. 2017. № 1. С. 41.

<sup>26</sup> CELAC // CELAC: official site. URL: <https://celacinternational.org>

<sup>27</sup> UNASUR // Encyclopedia Britannica. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/UNASUR>

<sup>28</sup> Сербин А. Новый цикл латиноамериканского регионализма в XXI в.? Вызовы и препятствия на этапе нормализации отношений между Кубой и США // Латинская Америка. 2016. № 2. С. 53.

<sup>29</sup> Сербин А. Новый цикл латиноамериканского регионализма в XXI в.... // Латинская Америка. 2016. № 1. С. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Mijares V.M. Venezuela's Post Chávez Foreign Policy. Is there a Maduro Doctrine? // Americas Quarterly. 2015. Winter. P. 79.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. P. 80.

Venezuela's main allies in the region are concentrated in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), established in 2004 at the initiative of Venezuela and Cuba.

Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América – Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos, ALBA-TCP) is an integration platform for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The institutional foundations for ALBA were officially laid on December 14, 2004, when the Presidents of Cuba, Fidel Castro and Venezuela, Hugo Chavez met in Havana and signed protocols on the establishment of the Alliance based on a model of independent development with an emphasis on regional complementarity, which allows strengthening cooperation based on mutual respect and solidarity. The fundamental principle underpinning the functioning of ALBA is the deep solidarity between the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>32</sup>.

The government of Venezuela, represented by Hugo Chávez, set very ambitious goals for itself. In particular, the main priority was not only becoming Venezuela a regional leader but also the entry of the country into the international arena as a strong global player. The idea of Latin American integration, as well as the slogan about the multipolarity of the world, serve as the basis of the concept of Bolivarianism. In turn, the ideas of Bolivarianism were the basis of Venezuelan policy under Hugo Chávez and remain so during the presidency of his successor, N. Maduro.

The efforts of the Venezuelan leadership are concentrated on the further strengthening of ALBA with the aim of forming a new model of political and economic integration. Implementation of this concept allows Venezuela to consolidate its position in the region, which is fully consistent with Venezuela's foreign policy ideological guidelines.

The key role in this anti-market and anti-globalization project, which is based not on competition, but on the solidarity and complementarity of economies, is given to the sponsorship of Venezuela. Up to a quarter of Venezuela's budget revenues were allocated for this purpose. For five years (2006-2010), Caracas spent 33 billion dollars on aid to its allies. The main recipients were Cuba (18.8 billion dollars), Bolivia (6.7 billion dollars), and Nicaragua (5.5 billion dollars)<sup>33</sup>.

The main instrument of Venezuela's influence on Latin American countries is oil. Because of the fact that Venezuela is a member of ALBA, the alliance has the largest oil reserves in the world. Preferential oil supplies are actively used to strengthen the country's authority. On the one hand, with the help of PetroCaribe, Venezuela is significantly increasing its influence in the region, increasing the dependence of the CELAC states on its energy resources and their debt dependence, and, on the other hand, the Venezuelan opposition considers such a policy a waste of national wealth<sup>34</sup> and puts pressure on N. Maduro's government accordingly.

However, it should be noted that Venezuela's relations with the countries of the region are not entirely one-sided. The closest relations are between Venezuela and Cuba (the leaders of these countries often speak of a single nation), and they are based on cooperation in the fields of education, medicine, sports, energy, and in social and cultural spheres.

At the beginning of 2013, 36 Cuban-Venezuelan enterprises were operating in the fields of energy, transport, tourism, communications, agriculture, construction, and mining. Havana assists its ally in implementing social projects: about 40,000 Cuban experts, mostly doctors, teachers, and sports coaches, work in Venezuela, and about 14,000 Venezuelan students study in Cuban universities. Cubans played an important role in the security agencies of Venezuela, including the protection of high-ranking state officials<sup>35</sup>.

N. Maduro made every effort to preserve and strengthen ties with his strategic ally. Immediately after being elected, he made an official visit to Havana as the head of state, where he participated in the work of a bilateral interstate commission. According to the results of the visit, it was planned to implement another 51 projects worth about 2 billion dollars.

The continuity of N. Maduro's regional policy within the framework of the ALBA project is evidenced by the meeting of the heads of state and government of 18 countries of Central America

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<sup>32</sup> History of ALBA-TCP // ALBA-TCP. URL: <https://www.albatcp.org/historia>; ALBA-TCP // ALBA-TCP. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140322013440/http://alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/alba-tcp-eng>

<sup>33</sup> *Ивановский З.В.* Внешняя и внутренняя политика Венесуэлы в условиях кризиса // *Латиноамериканский исторический альманах*. 2014. Вып. 14. С. 240.

<sup>34</sup> *Ігнат'єв П.М.* Геополітичні та гео економічні інтереси у світовій політиці. Чернівці-Київ: Книги-XXI, 2014. С. 324-325.

<sup>35</sup> *Ивановский З.В.* Внешняя и внутренняя политика... С. 240.

and the Caribbean, members of the PetroCaribe association, which took place on May 4-5, 2014. The participants of the summit declared their aspiration to strengthen the Venezuela-supported bloc and establish an economic zone on its basis<sup>36</sup>.

The advantages of ALBA, which were clearly observed until 2015, attracted new countries to the alliance, especially those states of the Caribbean and Central America, which had insignificant natural resources and financial potential. This is confirmed by the bloc's development dynamics: in 2013, St. Lucia, and in 2014, Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis joined it.

In December 2014, the 13<sup>th</sup> ALBA Summit commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Alliance's establishment was held, and the members of the Alliance supported the Venezuelan administration in its difficult situation (primarily in the domestic political sphere). The meeting was held in Havana (Cuba) and resulted in a declaration, in which a significant number of points directly related to Venezuela and its situation. According to the main points of the *ALBA Declaration of December 14, 2014*, concerning Venezuela the ALBA member states agreed to:

1. Ratify the support for the efforts being undertaken by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela headed by President Nicolás Maduro Moros, in order to preserve the immense legacy of Commander Hugo Chávez Frías.

2. To support the Bolivarian Government of Venezuela in its efforts to safeguard the peace in the country and to definitively defeat destabilizing intents and the economic war unleashed by the enemies of the Bolivarian process at home and abroad, considering that these aggressions are also a threat against the integrating efforts throughout the region.

3. Energetically condemn approval by the US Congress of sanctions against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and express the most profound support and solidarity with the people and the government of that sister country, emphasizing that the ALBA-TCP countries will not permit the use of old practices that have already been applied in the region, directed to promote change in political regimes as it has occurred in other regions of the world. At the same time, firmly reject any type of aggression, whether legal, economic or political, against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and also against any of the ALBA-TCP member countries.

4. Support the commitment of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with the PetroCaribe Project, recognized for its usefulness and contributions to energy security and the economic and social development of member countries.

5. Welcome the election of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a Non-Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2015-2016 period. This is a demonstration of the great prestige and leadership that have been attained by Venezuela and the support of the majority in the international community for the Bolivarian Revolution under President Nicolás Maduro Moros.

6. Welcome the upcoming assumption to the Pro Tempore Presidency of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in April 2016.

7. Reaffirm support for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the occasion of assuming the Presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as of the year 2015<sup>37</sup>.

In 2015, the situation in Venezuela reached critical limits, which led to a reduction in the preferential oil supplies of 18 PetroCaribe member countries. While in 2014, the volume of supplied oil amounted to 78.3% of the value stipulated in the agreement (129 thousand barrels per day), then in 2015 it was only 65%. In addition, in the period from January to September 2013, the volume of loans granted to oil recipient countries decreased by 68.5% (over 3.7 billion dollars) compared to the same period in 2012 and turned out to be the lowest (1.7 billion dollars), since 2006. In 2015, oil supplies to Cuba also decreased by 20%<sup>38</sup>.

On March 17, 2015, the 9<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary ALBA Summit was held in Caracas (Venezuela) to announce the firm support of the ALBA countries for the Bolivarian people and government of Venezuela, considering the US policy towards Venezuela. Following the results of the summit, the ALBA countries delivered a number of joint statements, condemning the US sanctions and calling for an American-Venezuelan dialogue.

According to the results of the summit, the 'Letter to the People of the United States: Venezuela is not a threat' was declared, in particular, regarding the following aspects: a) the commitment of

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<sup>36</sup> Ивановский З.В. Внешняя и внутренняя политика... С. 240-241.

<sup>37</sup> XIII Cumbre del Alba-TCP. Declaración Final – Conmemoración Del X Aniversario // ALBA-TCP. 2014. December 14. URL: <https://bit.ly/3m9RSkH>

<sup>38</sup> Семенов В.Л. Финал «Боливарианского проекта»?... С. 42.

Venezuela to freedom, independence, and multilateralism; b) Venezuela's fundamental belief in peace, national sovereignty, and international law; c) the reality of Venezuela as an open and democratic society according to its Constitution and the aspirations of its people; d) the false, unjust, unilateral, and disproportional action encompassed in the Executive Order of the government of the United States of America, where Venezuela is declared to be a threat to the national security of the United States of America.

Thus, the leaders of ALBA member countries amid the economic crisis of 2014-2015 (oil price slump since the beginning of the summer of 2014 from 115 US dollars per barrel of Brent oil to 36 US dollars by the end of 2015<sup>39</sup>) expressed their solidarity with Venezuela and supported the government of N. Maduro in its efforts to protect the sovereignty and independence of the country, and also declared their firm support for Venezuela in the confrontation with the United States and condemned the American government for its violation of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs<sup>40</sup>.

The 14<sup>th</sup> (March 5, 2017) and 15<sup>th</sup> (March 5, 2018) ALBA summits once again supported the government of N. Maduro<sup>41</sup>. In this respect, the 15<sup>th</sup> summit rejected the exclusion of Venezuela from the 8<sup>th</sup> summit of the Organization of American States (OAS), calling for non-interference in the internal affairs of the state and to stop the policy of unilateral sanctions against Venezuela: "We underline the lack of moral authority of third countries to teach lessons to the countries of the region on democracy and human rights, and we demand respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of the Venezuelan people..."

We reject the unilateral coercive measures and sanctions imposed against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela which harm the life and development of the noble Venezuelan people and the enjoyment of their rights.

We renew our firm support to the Constitutional President of the Bolivarian Republic, Nicolas Maduro Moros, his government, and the democratic process that he is leading<sup>42</sup>.

At the same time, the continuation of the Venezuelan political and economic crisis had led to a decrease in the effectiveness of N. Maduro's energy diplomacy, which weakened the cohesion of the alliance. A clear sign of the lack of unity was the vote in the OAS on the non-recognition of the 2018 presidential elections in Venezuela. Only three ALBA member countries spoke against that resolution: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Bolivia, and Dominica<sup>43</sup>.

In addition, a real hard fall to the association was Ecuador's withdrawal on August 23, 2018, a country which for a long time was a key ally of Caracas and the recipient for its financial assistance<sup>44</sup>. The official reason was the humanitarian crisis caused by the uncontrolled migration flow from Venezuela and the indifference of the Venezuelan government to the fate of its citizens.

In November 2019, when N. Maduro's second term had already begun, a similar decision was made by the interim unrecognized by N. Maduro administration of Bolivia, which called on Venezuelan diplomatic staff to leave the country and recognized J. Guaido as the head of the neighboring state. As a result, at the end of 2019, in the ALBA project, based on the solidarity and complementarity of economies, apart from Venezuela, only Cuba, Nicaragua, and several small Caribbean countries remained<sup>45</sup>. And although Bolivia rejoined the Alliance in 2020, its temporary withdrawal showed the weakness of the organization's cohesion.

Thus, the systemic crisis in Venezuela and the increased isolation of the country had serious negative consequences for subregional and regional processes in Latin America, which had ceased to be unity in diversity. The minimization of Venezuelan assistance, protest actions, and the consolidation of the opposition in Nicaragua, and especially the change of government course in

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<sup>39</sup> Нуньес-Саранцева Н.Н. Особенности функционирования... С. 25.

<sup>40</sup> Declaration of the IX Extraordinary ALBA-TCP Summit // ALBA-TCP. 2015. March 17. URL: <https://bit.ly/3U5VfWp>

<sup>41</sup> Declaración Final: Defendamos la Unión, la Dignidad y la Soberanía de Nuestra América. Declaración de la XIV Cumbre de Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno del ALBA-TCP. 05/03/2017 // Portal ALBA. URL: <https://bit.ly/3KdpmY>; Declaración de la XV Cumbre del ALBA-TCP. 05/03/2018 // ALBA-TCP. URL: <https://www.albatcp.org/acta/declaracion-de-la-xv-cumbre-del-alba-tcp/>

<sup>42</sup> Declaración de la XV Cumbre del ALBA-TCP. 05/03/2018 // ALBA-TCP. URL: <https://www.albatcp.org/acta/declaracion-de-la-xv-cumbre-del-alba-tcp/>

<sup>43</sup> Rodríguez Rosas R. Con 19 votos a favor, 4 en contra y 11 abstenciones OEA aprueba resolución sobre Venezuela (5 junio 2018). URL: <http://bit.ly/438FgD>

<sup>44</sup> Rozental D.M., Jeifets V.L. Política Exterior De Venezuela En El Ambiente De Inestabilidad // Iberoamérica. 2018. No 4. P. 53-76. P. 63.

<sup>45</sup> Ивановский З.В., Розенталь Д.М. Венесуэла: политическое противостояние... С. 87-88.



Ecuador and Bolivia, had sharply reduced the influence and capabilities of ALBA, bringing the Alliance closer to the most serious crisis in its history.

#### **THE COMMUNITY OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES (COMUNIDAD DE ESTADOS LATINOAMERICANOS Y CARIBEÑOS; CELAC)**

The unification processes occurring at the regional and subregional levels, depending on the geographical location or ideological indicators of the members, increase the risk of conflict situations between integration entities and fragmentation of the region in general. Therefore, CELAC plays a significant role in uniting Latin American countries, since this project creates not only a basis for political dialogue but also promotes the development of conditions for the spread of multi-vector integration. The agreement on the establishment of the organization was signed on February 23, 2010, and the organization was inaugurated at the 1<sup>st</sup> CELAC Summit on December 3, 2011, held in Caracas (Venezuela).

The organization is aimed at increasing hemispheric cooperation in social, economic, and security matters, and is also expected to become the main representative body of the region, providing a space to amplify the continent's voice on the international stage. Unlike the Organization of American States (OAS), the US and Canada are not represented within the bloc, which also aspires to neutralize US influence within the region<sup>46</sup>.

The founding summit of CELAC (December 3, 2011), chaired by Hugo Chavez, adopted the 'Declaration of Caracas' as a document containing a program of action, the organization's Charter, the Caracas Action Plan 2012, the Declaration in Defense of Democracy and 19 special communiques on topical issues in the region and the world. The Action Plan considered, first of all, the intensification of integration processes in the region. CELAC summits in 2013-2019 were held in Chile (2013), Cuba (2014), Costa Rica (2015), Ecuador (2016), and the Dominican Republic (2017)<sup>47</sup>. Next summits planned to be held in El Salvador (2018) and Bolivia (2019) did not take place<sup>48</sup>.

The subjects of discussion at the annual CELAC meetings were economic cooperation, disarmament, decolonization, nuclear non-proliferation, settlement of territorial disputes and civil wars, migration policy, climate change, issues of indigenous peoples, and the fight against poverty, hunger, and terrorism. In the Santiago Declaration, adopted as a result of the 1<sup>st</sup> Summit held on January 27-28, 2013 in Santiago (Chile), the agreements on political, economic, and cultural integration in the region were reaffirmed<sup>49</sup>.

The establishment of CELAC was one of the vivid manifestations of the 'left turn' with its state-nationalist bias and emphasized interest in solving pressing social problems in domestic politics by the state from the top-down and ensuring its independence from global actors, primarily the United States. Those were also attempts at some kind of 'protection' from the globalization processes and the neoliberal levelling of the state's role in public life. However, the economic progress of Latin American countries was largely driven by the rapid economic growth of a new global player, China, which on an increasing scale was buying raw materials and selling inexpensive goods in the region. China has gradually become a major trading partner for many countries, and eventually an investor<sup>50</sup>.

Already at the 3<sup>rd</sup> summit (January 28-29, 2015, Costa Rica), the members of the organization took a rather tough line regarding US anti-Venezuelan sanctions. The participating countries opposed Washington's interference in Venezuela's internal affairs. Cuban leader Raul Castro called the sanctions "unacceptable and unfounded". The President of Nicaragua Daniel Ortega said that the US wanted to repeat in Venezuela the Chilean scenario of 1973, referring to the coup d'état of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). And the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Hector Timerman, characterized the American sanctions as "unfair, illegal, and immoral"<sup>51</sup>. At the 4<sup>th</sup> (January 27, 2016, Ecuador) and the 5<sup>th</sup> (January 25, 2017, Dominican Republic) summits, the rejection of American

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<sup>46</sup> Boothroyd R. CELAC, Counter-OAS Organisation Inaugurated in Caracas // Venezuelanalysis.com. 2011. 5<sup>th</sup> December. URL: <https://venezuelanalysis.com/Nido>

<sup>47</sup> Космина В. Латинська Америка після «лівого повороту»: нові виклики // Вчені записки ТНУ імені В.І. Вернадського. Серія: Історичні науки. 2017. Том 28 (67), № 2. С. 55.

<sup>48</sup> CELAC. URL: <https://celacinternational.org>

<sup>49</sup> Сулейманов А.В. CELAC... С. 51.

<sup>50</sup> Космина В. Латинська Америка після «лівого повороту»... С. 55-56.

<sup>51</sup> Сулейманов А.В. CELAC... С. 53.

sanctions against Venezuela was confirmed. The countries appealed to the US government not to extend the sanctions that were approved on March 9, 2015<sup>52</sup>.

Also, at the 5<sup>th</sup> summit, the participants spoke about the internal crisis in Venezuela. In particular, they supported the process of the national dialogue between the government and the opposition with the mediation of UNASUR Secretary General Ernesto Samper, former presidents José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Leonel Fernández, Martín Torrijos, and the special representative of His Holiness Pope Francis. The final declaration called for “taking measures to achieve concrete results, as well as urgently implement the agreements reached so far, guarantee the continuity of the process and resume negotiations in good faith and with a high constructive commitment and in full respect of the rule of law, human rights, and democratic institutions, especially distribution of power within the framework of the constitution and laws of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and in accordance with the principle of respect for non-interference in the internal affairs of the states”<sup>53</sup>.

At the same time, during 2016-2017, new political regimes were established in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and a number of other countries. Their governments came together with the US as fierce opponents of the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. As a result, the leaders of several leading states in the region: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile were not present at the 2017 summit. The Venezuelan crisis deepened the current contradictions and resulted in a temporary suspension of its activities in CELAC, which dramatically reduced the effectiveness of the organization<sup>54</sup>.

Since all decisions in CELAC should be made by consensus, which was almost impossible given the ambiguous attitude toward Venezuela, the association had turned into a kind of discussion club and had failed to contribute to resolving the conflict in that country. In 2018-2020, CELAC summits were failed to be convened, and in 2019, Brazil decided to withdraw from the association (withdrew in January 2020). According to the Brazilian Foreign Minister, in the context of the regional crisis, CELAC had not achieved significant results in the field of democracy protection or any other area and was only a cover for undemocratic regimes in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua<sup>55</sup>.

Although in general, CELAC's activities were ineffective (most of the region's problems had not been solved, including poverty, corruption, crime, etc.), there were examples of successful implementation of its decisions in 2013-2018. It is necessary to mention CELAC's mediation mission in resolving the diplomatic and humanitarian crisis between Colombia and Venezuela, active efforts to resolve the economic blockade of Cuba, peacekeeping activities in Colombia, and the development of external relations with the European Union.

Thus, CELAC was unable to solve the key problems of Latin American integration and overcome the fragmentation of Latin American regionalism. N. Maduro had not managed to implement any significant projects within the organization, and instead of becoming a leader, Venezuela had turned into an outcast who needed constant protection and patronage. At the same time, although the organization went through a crisis during the studied period, it has not completely lost its potential. Attempts to develop a multilateral approach for solving acute regional problems on the basis of CELAC may be evidence of another step towards Latin American integration and the readiness of the countries of the region to intensify their influence on international processes.

## **THE UNION OF SOUTH AMERICAN NATIONS (UNASUR)**

H. Chavez had high expectations for the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), where Venezuela was one of the founders of the regional association. From the beginning, UNASUR was seen as an instrument to keep the Organization of American States (OAS) out of South America. While the Brazilian government had lost its interest in the organization as an instrument of regional power projection, UNASUR became more critical for Venezuela as an instrument of ‘regime boosting’ and ‘soft balancing’ against the US<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Declaración política de quito – mitad del mundo. 27.01.2016 // Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA). P. 3. URL: <http://s017.sela.org/media/2088261/iv-cumbre-celac-declaracion-politica.pdf>; Declaración Política de Punta Cana. 25.01.2017 // Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA). URL: <http://bit.ly/3GgQLqg>

<sup>53</sup> Declaración Política de Punta Cana. 25.01.2017 // Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA). URL: <http://bit.ly/3GgQLqg>

<sup>54</sup> Сулейманов А.В. CELAC... С. 57; Гаврилова Н.В. (ред.). Зовнішня політика країн Латинської Америки... С. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Ивановский З.В., Розенталь Д.М. Венесуэла: политическое противостояние... С. 89-90.

<sup>56</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR... P. 96.

The first great challenge in creating UNASUR was to provide an institutional design flexible enough to allow states as dissimilar as Brazil and Suriname or rivals, such as Colombia and Venezuela, to converge on a common project. Physical belonging to South America was the central criterion of membership. Regarding the scope of issues covered, UNASUR's institutional design was ambitious and in line with post-hegemonic regionalism, establishing a dozen sectoral councils covering different areas: defense, health, electoral issues, energy, science, technology, and innovation, culture, social development, economy and finance, education, infrastructure and planning, drugs, citizen security, and the coordination of activities against transnational organized crime. The proliferation of sectoral councils sought to incorporate countries with different interests in the regional project. According to V. Mijares and D. Nolte, a single focal entity did not centralize these multiple goals due to the varying importance of member countries<sup>57</sup>.

Within the framework of the dynamic structure of UNASUR, it was supposed to solve issues related to ensuring regional security and defense matters. The inclusion of those issues in the scope of its activities fundamentally distinguished this organization from all the associations that existed before. To consider those issues, the Defense Council (organization of collective defense) was established within the framework of UNASUR, the purpose of which was to consolidate the efforts of the countries of South America to create a South American zone of peace, to form common approaches in matters of regional and international security, to participate in peacekeeping operations, as well as to establish contacts for solving issues of defense and fighting against drug trafficking<sup>58</sup>.

After coming to power, N. Maduro immediately used the organization's authority to eliminate possible international condemnation of the dubious democracy of the presidential election. Moreover, an invitation was made for UNASUR to play a supervisory role in the electoral polls by being independent, impartial, and respecting Venezuelan sovereignty. The agreement between Venezuela and UNASUR was signed on March 25<sup>th</sup>, and it formalized UNASUR's commitment to observing elections in that country. The organization deployed approximately forty-two observers. Despite some violations pointed out by the representatives of Colombia and Brazil, the elections were generally recognized as democratic<sup>59</sup>.

That was facilitated by the fact that the former Venezuelan Foreign Minister Alí Rodríguez Araque held the position of Secretary General of the organization since June 11, 2012 (June 11, 2012 – July 31, 2014) and contributed to the convening of an Extraordinary meeting of the UNASUR Council of Foreign Ministers on April 18, 2013, in Lima, Peru. The emergency summit proclaimed its support for the presidential elections in Venezuela and called for the recognition of their results: "The UNASUR countries call on all parties involved in the electoral process to respect the official results of the presidential election published by the National Electoral Council of Venezuela"<sup>60</sup>. That was a significant victory for N. Maduro, which was gained with the help of a regional organization.

According to V. Mijares and D. Nolte, it was a fortuitous constellation for the Venezuelan government that former Venezuelan foreign minister Ali Rodríguez held the organization's Secretary General position when Maduro came to power since the regime became questioned after the controversial presidential elections in 2013. Rodríguez never visited the seat of UNASUR in Ecuador, exercising his function from Caracas. He stayed in office until August 2014, slightly over a year longer than initially planned. This was attributed to the lack of consensus between the UNASUR governments regarding a successor and the strategy of the Venezuelan government to avoid at all costs that someone not in accordance with their interests would take the position. His successor, former Colombian President Ernesto Samper, took a benevolent stance regarding the Venezuelan government, shielding it against the critics<sup>61</sup>.

Because of that internal tension, the supranational bureaucracy and leadership were not consolidated. A consequence of UNASUR's structural crisis was its inability to reach a consensus on the election of its Secretary General, which had always been one of its problems. On January 31, 2017,

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<sup>57</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR... P. 95.

<sup>58</sup> Гаврилова Н.В. (ред.). Зовнішня політика країн Латинської Америки... С. 27.

<sup>59</sup> Borda S. The Union of South American Nations. Series: Mapping Multilateralism in Transition, No 3. New York: International Peace Institute, 2014. 16 p. P. 7-8. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09508>

<sup>60</sup> Aquino M., Vélez P. Sudamérica apoya triunfo electoral de Maduro, pero pide diálogo en Venezuela // Reuters. 2013. April 19. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/latinoamerica-venezuela-unasur-idLTASIE93H05G20130419>

<sup>61</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR... P. 96-97.

former Colombian president Ernesto Samper terminated his function as Secretary General, and when the Argentine government was about to take over UNASUR's presidency pro tempore in April 2017, on the one hand, it proposed an Argentine candidate for the vacant position of General Secretary and, on the other, it suggested a repositioning of UNASUR with a stronger focus on economic cooperation. Both proposals immediately met with Venezuela's (and Bolivia's) resistance<sup>62</sup>.

The Venezuelan regime was afraid of electing a disloyal Head of the organization because, for the Venezuelan government, it was important to control the election of the successor of Samper, even risking the paralysis and breakdown of UNASUR. De facto, Venezuela and Bolivia blocked the Argentine candidate José Octavio Bordon, supported by seven governments. In the end, UNASUR's fate was sealed by Venezuela's veto. While the Venezuelan government became openly authoritarian, culminating in the 'non-democratic' re-election of N. Maduro in May 2018, the center-right governments in South America saw decreasing benefits in sharing membership with a hostile and trouble-making government in UNASUR. From their perspective, it was, in the end, a logical step to leave the organization<sup>63</sup>.

On April 18, 2018, the foreign ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru announced the suspension of membership in the association due to the lack of concrete results in the organization's activities. The decision was caused by the chaos that arose in the absence of a Secretary General since January 1, 2017 (Bolivia held the interim presidency of the organization), as well as by the rejection by Nicolas Maduro and Evo Morales of the candidacy of the Argentinean José Octavio Bordon, despite the support of the majority of members. Since the conflict situation was based on political and ideological cleavages, and the decision was taken by consensus, the situation could have been endless<sup>64</sup>.

As a result, in 2018-2019, the organization was withdrawn by Colombia in August 2018, Ecuador in March 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay in April 2019, and Uruguay in March 2020. In March 2019, the Forum for the Progress of South America (Foro para el Progreso de América del Sur, PROSUR) was established at the initiative of Colombia and Chile to strengthen regional ties. The organizers of the new association did not invite N. Maduro, and J. Guaido considered his participation premature<sup>65</sup>. Since most member countries stopped making contributions, the organization's headquarters was closed and the general secretariat was dissolved<sup>66</sup>. However, the organization officially continues to exist consisting of four states – Bolivia, Venezuela, Guyana, and Suriname.

According to V. Mijares and D. Nolte<sup>67</sup>, the UNASUR crisis is evidence of the destruction of South America. In addition to the predictable hegemonic lurches of policy, the processes of greater or lesser cohesion in the region related to geopolitical macro trends intensified as a result of government changes in recent years. The organization's weak institutional structure, which served so well to build its initial consensus, ultimately undermined its unity by failing to create a supranational institutional framework capable of transcending temporary government projects. National autonomies had the final say, which exceeded the regional autonomy, since the decisions made by the organization's bodies were not always implemented at the state level.

In addition, the Venezuelan problem, which could not be resolved within the regional organization, was a key catalyst for the dissolution of UNASUR. For many countries, the best option was not to meet with the other governments within UNASUR and not to take decisions on Venezuela. UNASUR was no longer seen as an instrument to strengthen the member states' autonomy within the international system, but as a burden that negatively affected South America's foreign perception. UNASUR had become a regional organization, which for most member countries only produced costs but no

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<sup>62</sup> Mijares V.M., Nolte D. Regionalismo posthegemónico en crisis... P. 110; Nolte Detlef, Mijares Víctor M. UNASUR... P. 96.

<sup>63</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR... P. 96.

<sup>64</sup> Ponce Vivanco J. Eduardo. El chavismo y la crisis de UNASUR // El Montonero. 2018. 18 de Mayo. URL: <https://elmontonero.pe/columnas/el-chavismo-y-la-crisis-de-unasur>

<sup>65</sup> Ивановский З.В., Розенталь Д.М. Венесуэла: политическое противостояние... С. 89.

<sup>66</sup> Comunicado de Prensa N° 18/20: Cancillería anuncia el retiro del Uruguay de la UNASUR y su regreso al TIAR. 10/03/2020 // Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. Sitio oficial de la República Oriental del Uruguay. URL: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-relaciones-exteriores/comunicacion/noticias/1820-cancilleria-anuncia-retiro-del-uruguay-unasur-su-regreso-tiar>

<sup>67</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. La crisis de Unasur y la deconstrucción de Sudamérica // El Espectador. 2018. 23 de abril. URL: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/la-crisis-de-unasur-y-la-deconstruccion-desudamerica-articulo-751730>

benefits. Venezuela, according to V. Mijares and D. Nolte, “became part of the broader power game played on the global stage”<sup>68</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking into consideration the theoretical and ideological foundations of Venezuela’s foreign policy, the conclusion can be made that the regional vector of foreign policy has remained one of the focal points for President Nicolas Maduro. In this vector, Venezuela actively developed both bilateral partnership relations and practiced multilateral diplomacy within the framework of integration associations.

Thanks to its resources and ideological dominance, the country could rightfully claim regional leadership, as it united the countries of the region on the wave of anti-Americanism, initiated many integration movements, and made most countries in the region dependent on its energy supplies and credits.

‘Pockets of resistance’ to US expansion in Latin America and regional integration were concentrated in three organizations where Venezuela was one of the founders or key players: ALBA, CELAC, and UNASUR.

The economic and political crisis that hit Venezuela sharply raised the question of the continuity of the ‘Bolivarian Project,’ which affected the change in the state’s priorities, including in the international arena. The decline in the growth of social and economic indicators in the country (especially the reduction of oil and its derivatives prices<sup>69</sup>) led to a weakening of the country’s ‘soft power’, and the international position of N. Maduro’s government as well. If in the years of prosperity for the Bolivarians, the main focus of foreign policy was on the idea of regional unity and strengthening the position of Caracas in Latin America, then during the crisis, the internal problems became of main priority for the Venezuelan government.

In the regional integration policy of Venezuela during N. Maduro’s first term of office, we can distinguish two qualitative periods: 1. 2013-2015, the time of relatively successful implementation of the regional integration course, and, 2. 2016-2018, the decline and actual collapse of the regional vector of Venezuela’s foreign policy. It was just the loss of democratic tendencies in Maduro’s domestic policy that led to the loss of regional leadership and global stature.

The three integration projects analyzed by the authors began to lose their credibility and effectiveness during 2013-2018, which happened mostly due to the crisis in Venezuela. Overlapping with the complex international situation and changes in political regimes in the partner states, regional integration in Latin America began to collapse. CELAC and UNASUR, on which H. Chávez put high hopes of turning Venezuela into a regional leader, de facto ceased their activities. The only instrument of N. Maduro’s regional influence remained ALBA, whose key players were not only close to Venezuela ideologically and politically but also continued to draw dividends in the form of preferential supplies of Venezuelan oil.

At the same time, it is difficult to disagree with political expert Victor M. Mijares, who just in 2015 noted that ‘Maduro’s doctrine’ is a survival from the Chavista political regime under adverse conditions, for it assumes a defensive configuration, instead of an offensive one, it retracts instead of being assertive, submitting itself to its real possibilities in a post-charismatic and falling oil incomes phase<sup>70</sup>. And N. Maduro’s foreign policy defeats in the regional vector only confirm the stated point of view.

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<sup>68</sup> Nolte D., Mijares V.M. UNASUR... P. 91-92.

<sup>69</sup> At the beginning of the Maduro mandate, in 2013, Venezuelan oil production averaged around 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd). In 2018 production is below 1.4 million bpd (Mijares V.M., Rojas S.N. Venezuelan Migration Crisis puts the Region’s Democratic Governability at Risk // GIGA Focus Lateinamerika. 2018. No 6. P. 2. URL: <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssaoar-59911-3>)

<sup>70</sup> Mijares V.M. Crude juggling: Venezuela petro-strategy between U.S. and China // Boletín del ISIAE. 2015. Vol. 60. P. 34-39.

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