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Facultat de Ciències Polítiques i de Sociologia

Grau en Relacions Internacionals

TREBALL DE FI DE GRAU

Towards a community of practice?

Cooperation against illegal drug trafficking between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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*Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.*

Abstract

The paper proposes that the vast network of structures for cooperation between the European Union and the countries from Latin America and the Caribbean in the field of the fight against drug trafficking conforms to a ‘community of practice’. According to Etienne Wenger, a community of practice is an international structure of cooperation consisting of a shared repertoire, a shared enterprise and a mutual engagement, as it is explained with detail in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

In the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 the European Union has increased the allocation of money dedicated to the topic of cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean against illicit drug trade. The amounts dedicated to the Cooperation Program between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug policy (Copolad) and the Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime (EL PAcCTO) have increased from 29 million to 73 million euros. Consequently, it is necessary to find a theoretical framework that helps to analyze this trend.

The research question was if “there is a security regime between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean in the field of the fight against illicit drug trafficking”. The research pretended to apply the concept of security regime, which refers to “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behavior in the belief that others will reciprocate”, according to Robert Jervis. However, the literature review determined that the concept has traditionally been linked to *high politics* issues such as weaponry and war. Thus, the scope needed a reinterpretation to use the concept of security regime as a tool for analyzing cooperation related to drug trafficking. In this sense, it was found that Christian Bueger opened this path when he qualified the African cooperation network against piracy as a security regime. Nevertheless, instead of providing a new definition, Burger proposed to use the concept of ‘community of practice’ as an instrument to analyze the formation of regime systems.

Therefore, this thesis adopts the concept of community of practice theorized by Etienne Wenger and translated into the International Relations realm by Emanuel Adler, which allows to open the black box of the state and reinterpret regime theory in a way through which it can become an instrument to analyze complex issues such as cooperation against illegal drug trafficking. The methodology has consisted of taking the three characteristics of a community of practice according to Wenger -*shared repertoire, shared enterprise and mutual engagement*- and operationalizing them in line with the examples provided by Bueger. Later, two cases of study, the cooperation programmes of Copolad and EL PAcCTO, have been selected and the research has determined if the characteristics previously mentioned could be identified or not in these programmes.

On the other hand, the research struggled against the theoretical limitations of the concept of security regime, which made it not suitable as a tool for analyzing cooperation against illegal drug trafficking. On the one hand, the characteristics mentioned in the previous paragraph were clearly identified and we can affirm that the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean conform to a community of practice in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking. The results and the relevance of the research are exposed with more detail in the pages hereunder.

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List of Abbreviations

AMERIPOL - *American Police Office.*

ANFAST - *Ameripol Network Fugitive Active Search Teams.*

CCPB - *Centre for Bi-national Police Cooperation between Panama and Costa Rica.*

CELAC - *Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.*

CFE - *Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.*

CLASI - *Latin American Committee on Homeland Security.*

COMJIB - *Conference of Ministers of Justice of the Ibero-American countries.*

Copolad - *Cooperation Program between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug policy. It is now in its third edition (Copolad III).*

EL PAcCTO - *Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime. It is now in its second edition (EL PAcCTO 2.0).*

EEAS - *European External Action Service.*

EMCDDA - *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.*

EMPACT - *European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats.*

ENFAST - *European Network Fugitive Active Search Teams.*

EU - *European Union.*

Europol - *European Police Office.*

Eurojust - *European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.*

FIIAPP - *International Foundation and for Iberoamerica of Administration and Public Policy. It is the Spanish cooperation agency in charge of COPOLAD and EL PAcCTO.*

GTEAP - *Specialized Technical Group on Penitentiary Matters of Mercosur.*

HR - *High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.*

INTERPOL - *International Criminal Police Organization.*

LAC - *Latin America and Caribbean.*

Mercosur - *Southern Common Market.*

NDOs - *National Drugs Observatories.*

OSCE - *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.*

PCCCs - *Police and Customs Cooperation Centres of the European Union.*

REDCOPEN - *Mercosur Penitentiary Cooperation Network.*

SIPA - *Information Police System of AMERIPOL.*

UNODC - *United Nations Office on Drug and Crime.*

Introduction and Justification of the Research

Drug trafficking is a serious challenge to democracy. At the beginning of the 2010s decade, the annual turnover of illegal drug markets worldwide was estimated at \$1 trillion (Standing, 2010). The salience of drug trafficking, often included in the broader category of transnational organized crime, has remained in the European public policy debate for decades. For example, the 2008 revision of the 2003 European Security Strategy recognized organized crime as one of the five major threats to security in the European Union, together with terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts and state failure (General Secretariat of the Council, 2008). Additionally, it worried about the diversification of criminal activities that englobe illegal traffic of people, weapons and wildlife. In fact, it recognized that the nature of threats to security had changed from having a purely military dimension, as they had during the Cold War era, to presenting diverse forms. Similarly, the revision of the European Security Strategy encouraged finding the required combination of available tools to deal with the issue (General Secretariat of the Council, 2008).

The strategy published in 2016 by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) Federica Mogherini maintained several references to the challenge of organized crime and announced that the Union was going to “expand cooperation and build stronger partnerships with Latin America and the Caribbean” as well as “develop multilateral ties with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and with different regional groupings according to their competitive advantage” in order to counter the threat (Mogherini, 2016). The current HR of the Union, Josep Borrell, continues to warn about the danger of organized crime and argues that the Union has to be active and effective at promoting its interests outside its borders, to all its strategic environment, if it wants to avoid that others fill this gap (Borrell, 2022). The Strategic Compass to Make Europe a Security Provider calls for deepening EU-LAC partnership in order to manage common challenges such as the smuggling of drugs.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) concentrates the totality of world cocaine production, as well as an extensive production of cannabis for internal consumption and for exportation. The problems “associated with drug production, trafficking and consumption in Latin America affect the quality of life of the population, are linked to forms of social exclusion and institutional weakness, generate greater insecurity and violence, and corrode governance in some countries” (Arriagada & Hopenhayn, 2000, 5). Some Latin American countries, such as Colombia and Mexico, have been plagued by drug violence for a long time. Others, such as Ecuador and Costa Rica, were traditionally considered secure and peaceful compared to some of their neighbors, but have suffered an outbreak of violence in recent years. Currently, a third of all world annual murders occur in Latin America, with most of them being attributed to organized crime by national authorities, and the International Crisis Group warns about a “new crime wave” whipping the region (Crisis Group, 2023).

There has been EU-LAC cooperation against illicit drug trade since the 1990s, under the principle of ‘shared responsibility’ (Selleslaghs, 2016, 529). Even so, in January 2024, Borrell revealed in his official blog ‘A Window on the World’ that Latin America has been rising in his agenda because of what he called ‘drug violence’. He pointed to drug trafficking as causing half of the homicides in the region and warned that the scale of criminal gangs is immense and they have surpassed some states in influence. The article accused these gangs of being behind a downward spiral menacing democracy itself and, furthermore, alerted that Europe was importing not only drugs from Latin America but drug violence dynamics too (Borrell, 2024). With all this data and because the EU is physically part of the LAC region through its ultra peripheral regions¹ (EEAS, 2012), the HR backed his position in favor of intensifying efforts with LAC against drug trafficking.

Consequently, interregional cooperation between the EU and LAC countries in the fight against drug trafficking is a relevant current topic for analysis, according to the importance that the official EU documents which have been referenced gave to it. Furthermore, new structures of cooperation such as the American Police Office (AMERIPOL) and the Mercosur Penitentiary Cooperation Network (REDCOPEN) among others, have been created or activated in the last five years and have not been analyzed by the academy yet, which leads a gap to be filled by new scholars.

¹ Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Saint Martin, Martinique (European Commission, 2011).

The objective of the research was to determine if the existing network of cooperation instruments between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean could be labeled as a security regime. This concept refers to “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behavior in the belief that others will reciprocate” (Jervis, 1982, 357). It was applied for the first time to the International Relations realm in 1982 by Robert Jervis in his seminal article “Security Regimes” published in the journal *International Organization*.

Nevertheless, after an extensive literature review, the research has found that the concept of security regime has difficult applicability to the analysis of cooperation against organized crime. Instead, the research considers that the notion of ‘community of practice’, which refers to “domains of knowledge that constitute communities of engaging practitioners bound by an interest in learning and performing shared practices” is a suitable reinterpretation of the instruments to analyze security cooperation (Adler et al., 2024, 2). This second concept has been widely used for the exploration in the field of International Relations (Adler et al., 2024, 3) and has been used before as an analytical framework for the study of organized crime by Christian Bueger (Bueger, 2013, 303-313).

In consequence, the research question is the following one: Do the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean form a community of practice in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking? To answer that question, the paper will expose in the following order: which is the current state of the literature about security regimes and communities of practice; which is the theoretical framework of the research; which is the methodology of research and how has the theory been operationalized; which are the results of the analysis; and which are the conclusions of this research.

1. Analytical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify which is the theory applied to the analysis of the research. To do so, the chapter explains: which are the different definitions of the concept of security regime; which are the authors that have used this concept before; which were the topics analyzed by them; which are the limitations of this concept regarding the analysis of cooperation against drug trafficking; which reinterpretations of the concept can overcome the limits that have been found; what is a community of practice and why has this concept been considered as useful for the research.

Robert Jervis is the outstanding author when we talk about ‘security regimes’. He developed a definition in 1982 when he participated in a publication of the famous journal *International Organization*. Most of the literature that applies this concept to the analysis has taken Jervis’ article as the key reference. Jervis defined a security regime as “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behavior in the belief that others will reciprocate” (Jervis, 1982, 357).

Jervis mentioned some examples of regimes that exist outside the field of security: they are common in the politics of trade, sea-bed exploitation, or international communications. In the security arena he argued that “both the incentives for establishing such regimes and the obstacles to so doing are especially great” because of the prisoner's dilemma (Jervis, 1982, 358). He defended the special value and difficulty of establishing any security regime by remembering that if any actor breaks the common norms, it endangers the full regime. Additionally, the fear that other members will break the security regime at any moment can lead any actor to preventively break the norms even if it agrees on the common and individual benefits of having a security regime about any topic. Jervis provides two examples of states breaking regimes in security and non-security fields, respectively: arms races in the topic of limits to weaponry and tariff wars in the topic of free trade promotion.

The author added an example to back his statements: he affirmed that the Concert of Europe that existed between 1815 and 1848 was a security regime about the issue of war. Previously, he detailed in which conditions can security regimes exist: disposition of the great powers to establish it, believe in the compromise of others in cooperation, believe in restraint as the best

security provider for oneself and believe that the alternative to the regime is costly (Jervis, 1982, 362).

The conditions provided by Jervis under which a security regime can be identified are very strict. He distances from more generic definitions related to ‘regime theory’ (Holtz et al., 2008, 629). His way of understanding has been followed by several authors. For example, Bailes and Cottey initially define regimes as frameworks that “define norms—of a cooperative and generally positive nature—for states’ behavior and often provide ways to implement, support and verify these norms” (Bailes & Cottey, 2005). However, this vague statement is followed by the provision of some examples of security-related regimes that evidence their alignment with Jervis’ narrow scope. As examples, they mention the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, 1975), the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces Treaty (CFE) and the Latin America initiative to declare a nuclear weapons-free region (Treaty of Tlatelolco, 1967).

This ‘traditional’ meaning of security regime is widely extended in the literature. On the one hand, it is simple and useful for the analysis because it avoids any polysemic interpretation of the word *regime*, which until nowadays has been used with several different meanings by social scientists. Hence, emulating Jervis’ conditions and methodology is a synonym of success in any research about cooperation on war and weaponry issues (see Nye Jr., 1987). For example, it can explain why Iroquois nations stopped fighting between them in pre-Columbian North America (Crawford, 1994). On the other hand, it cannot be useful for the study of all cooperation issues. Returning to the original definition of a security regime as “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behavior in the belief that others will reciprocate” (Jervis, 1982, 357), and re-reading the practical examples that were given until now, we can discover a common characteristic of any security regime according to the ‘traditional’ point of view: it exists to stimulate state restraint and avoid state-caused problems -such as war, arms races, disrespect for borders, etc.

Unfortunately, the ‘traditional’ interpretation of the concept cannot be applied to this analysis. Although part of the literature about organized crime highlights the synergies between the state and organized crime, emphasizing the symbiosis of corruption, criminality and state building processes (Tilly, 2017; Decoeur, 2018; Bobea, 2016) it is difficult to point out to the state as direct producer of illicit drugs, as we could point it as direct producer of weapons or

war. Traditional security regimes are common norms which avoid war escalations and arm races. In contrast, despite state's failures could be behind the rise of organized crime, the objective of cooperation between states against drug trafficking is not to 'restrain' the other state from producing drugs but to build a partnership against non-state actors: the criminal groups. Thus, it was necessary for this research to find whether the concept of security regime had been used before to analyze such a complex topic.

The initial search was very poor, in the sense that some scholars combine the worlds 'security' and 'regime' without providing a clear definition of what are they talking about (Powell, 2005) or extent the concept with broader understandings such as 'social security regime' (Bruga & Candas, 2011) or 'health security regime' (Hoffman, 2010). It seems that they consider a regime to be any system of shared rules and practices and thus, a security regime to be any system of shared rules and practices about security issues. Besides, this legitimate interpretation is useless as an analytical instrument if vocabulary is used without clarifying what is the author referring to when she or he uses the concept.

In spite of the set of difficulties listed above, I have found a significant theoretical basis for my research analysis in the article written by Christian Bueger about the African 'maritime security regime'. Burger argues that a maritime security regime is being built between African countries to combat the "piracy momentum" (Bueger, 2013). Burger maintains that piracy attacks in the African coasts have drawn considerable attention to strengthen the maritime security architecture of the continent, through intergovernmental cooperation. Hence, his theoretical and methodological proposal deals with the challenge of applying the concept of security regime to the field of organized crime, as does mine. He considers that "to use the concept as a tool requires, however, some reinterpretation of the traditionalist notion and rephrasing it in the light of contemporary security theory" and that "the core question addressed in [his] article is whether the current activities of building [an African maritime] security regime complex can be understood as moves to the formation of a 'security community'" (Bueger, 2013, 299)².

I will use the approach to security regimes proposed by Bueger because, at the same time, it is less restrictive than Jervis' definition and more concrete than other interpretations which

² These concepts are not relevant to the research. Any important meaning for understanding the analysis is explained briefly in the introduction and with more detail in the analytical framework part.

understand a regime as the mere existence of some common rules. The appropriateness of his theoretical framework to my research is quite relevant, because he analyzes piracy, which is a similar topic to drug trafficking: both pertain to organized crime activities. Apart from sharing the nature of the challenge, my research share the same type of cooperation policies to deal with it, composed of “security structures [which] have a significant degree of complexity, form anything but a well-ordered coherent whole, and are characterized by informality, process, multiplicity, overlap, contradictions, and incoherencies” (Bueger, 2013, 299).

In addition, Bueger introduces the concept of ‘community of practice’ as an useful tool for analyzing the formation of communities and regime systems and framing security cooperation about non-traditional issues (Bueger, 2013, 301). Communities of practices “are domains of knowledge that constitute communities of engaging practitioners bound by an interest in learning and performing shared practices. Sustained by a repertoire of communal resources, these practices embody the community’s knowledge and confer its practitioners the dispositions and expectations necessary to cultivate shared values, legitimize authority, and thus engage in mutually negotiated evolving joint enterprises” (Adler et al., 2024, 2).

Since 2005, when the concept of community of practice was introduced to International Relations theory by Emanuel Adler, it has been used to analyze security communities, feminism, piracy, diplomacy, Islamism, multilateralism, peacekeeping and the functioning of international organizations such as the ASEAN or the UN Alliance of Civilizations (Adler et al., 2024, 3). Hence, this conceptualization “allows for grasping complexity” of a variety of issues and “for disaggregating the state as unitary actor and focusing on the transnational dimension” (Bueger, 2013, 302).

Communities of practice are “social fabrics of relations in action” (Adler et al., 2024, 3) which, according to Etienne Wenger, are composed of a *shared repertoire* of tools used by the community in its practices, a *shared enterprise* which is the distinct project that the community pursues, and a *mutual engagement* which is the dimension that allows continuous interactions, communication, and deliberations among a community’s members (Bueger, 2013, 302).

2. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to expose the methodology that has been used in the research. In other words, the chapter pretends to explain how the theory and the cases of study were selected and how the analytical framework was operationalized for a proper application.

To begin with, the research was based on a literature review about the security regime theory through Google Scholar, by searching the most referenced articles that had the words *security regime* in the title. The reading had two purposes: mapping the different manners of understanding the concept and selecting the methodology that fits the most with the case of analysis. Jervis was identified as the most relevant author that has written about the security regime. At the same time, it was seen that his interpretation of the concept was not applicable to the research topic and the analytical framework of the research changed scope by finding the concept of community of practice. Thus, the same procedure was followed with this new concept to search the different definitions of it and the way in which it was applied before. The concept of community of practice, as it was explained in the previous chapter, was considered useful for this analysis because it has been used before to analyze cooperation against organized crime and it has clear characteristics which allow it to replicate a cohesive methodology.

This research has used the same methodology as Christian Bueger on his analysis about cooperation against maritime organized crime in Africa: to adopt the characteristics of a community of practice proportioned by Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 1999, 72). Bueger describes a community of practice as something being composed of a *shared repertoire* of tools used by the community in its practices, a *shared enterprise* which is the distinct project that the community pursues, and a *mutual engagement* which is the dimension that allows continuous interactions, communication, and deliberations among a community's members (Bueger, 2013, 302), as it was said in the analytical framework. A *shared repertoire* can include "documents, databases, or communication technology", as well as "symbolic tools, such as representations, concepts or a common language code", while a *shared enterprise* provides "standards of evaluation as well as normative direction for the community". Finally, a *mutual engagement* can be understood as the intense communication that gives coherence to the previous characteristics and allows the collective to exist (Bueger, 2013, 302).

Bueger's methodology to identify a community of practice was based on Etienne Wenger's statement affirming that interactions within communities of practice "include mutual engagement through interactions, a joint enterprise in a common practice, and a shared repertoire of communal resources" (Wenger 2000, 229). This definition is still valid, and Emanuel Adler reaffirmed it in January 2024 (Adler et al., 2024, 3).

Therefore, to answer the research question and identify if there is a community of practice between the EU and the LAC in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking, this research has tried to answer the following questions: Is there a *shared repertoire* about the topic? Is there a *shared enterprise* about the topic? And, is there a *mutual engagement* about the topic?

The three concepts were operationalized into things that could be identified with an oversight of the cases of study. If a *shared repertoire* is composed of common databases according to Bueger's definition, for example, we have to look if there are common databases to fight illegal drug trafficking between the European Union and the Latin America and Caribbean in order to affirm that there is a *shared repertoire* about the topic. In the case of a *shared enterprise*, the research looked for a common institution building process as a requisite to identify this component. In the case of a *mutual engagement*, it was analyzed by looking for the existence of a framework for regular interaction, communication and deliberation about the topic. This procedure is summarized in the following table:

Identifying a community of practice

Components of a 'community of practice' (Wegner, 2000; Bueger 2013; Adler et al. 2024)	Components operationalized into	Variables
Is there a shared repertoire?	Do the EU and LAC have common databases, procedures and language codes about illegal drug trafficking?	V1
Is there a shared enterprise?	Has there been an institution building project for combating illegal drug trafficking?	V2
Is there a mutual engagement?	Is there a framework for regular interaction, communication and deliberation in order to strengthen the community for combating illegal drug trafficking?	V3

Source: own elaboration, from Bueger's methodology (Bueger, 2013, 302).

As it was said in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, the first methodological step was to identify a suitable analytical framework and operationalize it in order to answer the research question. The second one was to find cases of study. This was done through a search through Google about which were the existing mechanisms of cooperation against illegal drug trafficking between the EU and LAC. The search included the reading of documents from the EU-CELAC summits (Michel & Gonsalves, 2023), presentations from Europol (Ebner, 2023) and conversations with professor Juan Pablo Soriano, who has wrote about interregional agendas on global security challenges (Soriano, 2019).

From all these sources of inspiration, the Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime (EL PACCTO) and the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug policy (Copolad), as well as the network of institutions financially or technically supported by these cooperation programmes, were established as cases of study of this research. Therefore, the analytical framework will be applied to them in order to answer the research question and affirm -or not- that there is a community of practice between the EU and LAC and the Caribbean in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking.

3. Analysis section

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question, by implementing the theory through the methodology that was explained in the previous pages. The chapter is divided into three sections linked each one to a component of a community of practice: Is there a *shared repertoire* about the topic? Is there a *shared enterprise* about the topic? And, is there a *mutual engagement* about the topic? The topic, for the sake of clarity, is the cooperation between the EU and LAC against illegal drug trafficking. Each section includes a brief introduction remembering the methodology used, advancing the results of the analysis and explaining what has been done, followed by the analysis *per se*, where the reader can find several examples, all of them with referenced sources.

3.1 - Is there a shared repertoire between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking?

The purpose of this section is to explain why there is a *shared repertoire* between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking. As it was said in chapters 1 and 2, a *shared repertoire* includes common “documents, databases, or communication technology” between the members of a community of practice (Bueger, 2013, 302). This section describes the current state of cooperation about the topic, presents the Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime (EL PAcCTO) and details which results of this programme can be considered as elements of a *shared repertoire*.

All EU member states and LAC countries are part of the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, also known as the Palermo Convention (UNTOC, 2024). Despite collective security systems can have a deficient performance due to large membership, which confuses “common judgment and common will to act against offenders” (Bailes & Cottey, 2005), the fact that all EU-LAC partners agree on that framework, provides common international legal basis of reference, as well as common terminology and standards, to the cooperation between the two regions we are talking about.

The cooperation network between the EU and LAC against organized crime -which includes drug trafficking- is extensive. Since 2017, the main instrument to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two regions has been the Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime (EL PAcCTO), according to the Deputy Executive Director of Europol (Ebner, 2023). Moreover, police and judicial cooperation has intensified with the participation of Latin American countries in the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), as well as the signature of international work agreements between this countries, the European Police Office (Europol) and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), among other actions (Ministerio del Interior, 2023).

EL PAcCTO is an international technical assistance programme that “addresses the entire criminal chain from an integral perspective through its work in three components: police, justice and penitentiary” (EL PAcCTO, 2024a). It was launched in 2018 in Buenos Aires,

with the participation of Spain, France, Italy, Portugal and eighteen Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The programme was established to last five years and had an amount of 19 million euros to promote citizen security and rule of law in the Latin American participant countries (EEAS, 2018). The European Union delegated its management to the international cooperation agencies FIIAPP España and Expertise France, which are specialized in technical cooperation in the field of public policies according to their websites. The secondary partners of the project were the Italian Instituto Ítalo-Americano and the Portuguese Instituto Camões, as well as some responsible people from AMERIPOL and INTERPOL (EEAS, 2018).

In 2023 the programme was extended for four more years and its scope was increased. This time, there are five European countries and 33 LAC countries participating. The main novelty has been the incorporation of the Caribbean states, as well as the Netherlands . Budget has also increased from 19 to 58 million euros (Cooperación Española, 2023). The involvement of more actors and better resources shows the interest of both the EU and the LAC region countries, as well as the good balance of the first edition.

The objective of EL PAcCTO is not financial assistance nor training from Europe to Latin America but it rather provides technical assistance for peer-to-peer learning and best practice sharing between EU and LAC countries (EL PAcCTO, 2024a). This means that it has some norm-building purposes because the objective is improving procedures to act against drug smugglers by unifying criteria and sharing information. Thanks to this programme, both regions now have joint databases, joint investigation teams and shared dialogue channels for policies about drug trafficking.

To encourage transborder police cooperation against organized crime, EL PAcCTO has financed a pilot project: the Centre for Bi-national Police Cooperation (CCPB) between Panama and Costa Rica. It is a work center established in Paso Canoas, a municipality located on the border between the two countries, and inspired by the Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs) that exist in the European Union. This center has an information exchange system, and an operational role of coordination of cross-border actions.

The sharing of data is performed through the integral informatic system ‘COPANCOS’, which records any interaction in a respectful manner with each country's legal scheme (EL PAcCTO, 2022a). The CCPB was inaugurated in June 2019, after a project formulation and a training period, and has been a success according to the Costa Rica Vice Minister of Public Security (TV Sur Pérez Zeledón, 2019), so several LAC countries have already expressed their interest in replicating the center in their border with a neighboring country.

In respect to judicial cooperation, EL PAcCTO has promoted the creation of Joint Investigation Teams (JIT) between the members of the programme. These are “legal agreements between competent authorities of two or more States for the purpose of carrying out criminal investigations” which are “made up of prosecutors and law enforcement authorities as well as judges” and function “for a fixed period, typically between 12 and 24 months, such as is necessary to reach successful conclusions to investigations” (Eurojust, 2024). This was a demand that the Public Prosecutor’s Offices of Argentina, Brasil, Uruguay, Chile and Peru had expressed in 2017 (EL PAcCTO, 2020).

On the one hand, it organized exchange visits of LAC authorities to the Eurojust headquarters in Brussels, to update coordination channels so joint investigation teams could be established if necessary. Some countries such as Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay established their first contact with Eurojust thanks to this initiative. On the other hand, the seminars and workshops of EL PAcCTO reunited for the first time the central authorities of LAC to discuss a simplification of international cooperation mechanisms. Also, the programme financed the modernization of the electronic transmission system used by the Conference of Ministers of Justice of the Ibero-American countries (COMJIB) and hired a group of experts that drafted the Rules of Procedure of the Specialized Networks and Working Groups. These rules were approved by the XXVII General Assembly of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors (AIAMP) and became the first LAC regional model of JITs (EL PAcCTO, 2024b). Since then, five JITs have been organized by the programme (EL PAcCTO, 2020).

The last key action of the programme EL PAcCTO was related to penitentiary cooperation. It addressed the challenge of transnational organized crime inside prisons. Actually, some criminal groups use prisons to recruit members and to promote the path of delinquency among prisoners. Because of the international impact of these organizations, the

imprisonment of their members in third countries, and their prosecution under different false names, it is difficult to have a coherent policy about the topic without international cooperation (EL PAcCTO, 2024c).

The programme supported for the first time the activation of a working group that would focus on co-operation between prison systems. The proposal was adopted at a meeting of the Mercosur ministers of Justice, which created in 2018 the Specialized Technical Group on Penitentiary Matters of Mercosur (GTEAP). The group works in the identification of penitentiary intelligence measures and the definition of common normative frameworks for management of the members of criminal organized groups inside prisons (EL PAcCTO, 2024c). Since 2019, it has created a network dedicated to the exchange of information between prison systems of different countries, which is called the Mercosur Penitentiary Cooperation Network (REDCOPEN). Through this structure, Brazil offered its data system PALAS NET to the other LAC and EU countries so they could exchange penitentiary information. By March 2020, 12.056 persons, objects, telephone numbers, images and documents had already been registered in the system (EL PAcCTO, 2024c). In 2022, a webinar of best practice sharing between experts and authorities in charge of the prison data system was held. Interpol, France, Italy and 12 LAC countries participated in the webinar (EL PAcCTO, 2022b).

Clearly, the vast quantity of actions that have been mentioned include at least three common datasets which are being constructed -the CCPB through the COPANCOS system, five JITs and the REDCOPEN through the PALAS NET system-, one consolidated common procedure -the Rules of Procedure of the Specialized Networks and Working Groups approved by the AIAMP- and many discussions, seminars, webinars, training visits or permanent technical groups -such as the GTEAP- to further develop common normative frameworks and coordinate more activities or understandings between EU and LAC countries.

For all the reasons mentioned above, and despite the limitations that these actions still have in terms of effectiveness or membership, we can consider that there is a *shared repertoire* between the EU and LAC in the fight against organized crime, which includes drug trafficking. Furthermore, this *repertoire* is exponential, because EL PAcCTO has contributed significantly to its generation, and the programme is given more financement for the next period, so its capabilities are expected to increase. In addition, the information provided has

only talked about one cooperation programme on the topic which, despite being the most important one, is just a selection. However, the author has considered that the abundance of results of this selection is sufficient to affirm that there is a *shared repertoire* about the topic.

3.2 - Is there a shared enterprise between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking?

The purpose of this section is to explain why there is a *shared enterprise* between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking. As it was said in chapters 1 and 2, a *shared enterprise* is a common institution building project (Bueger, 2013, 302). This section explains how EL PAcCTO and Copolad have contributed to the institutionalization and strengthening of AMERIPOL and National Drugs Observatories (NDOs) and why this can be considered as an institution building process.

Some of the examples that have been exposed in chapter 3.1 can already be considered as an institution building project. Nevertheless, there is still a bigger task in that direction which has been implemented by EL PAcCTO: the activation of AMERIPOL. This organization was founded in 2007 to promote and strengthen police cooperation in LAC, by improving technical capabilities, international coordination, mutual assistance and information exchange (AMERIPOL, 2023a). Currently, it is composed of police agencies from 29 countries of LAC, as well as 32 observers from outside the region. Among the observers, there is Europol, Interpol, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and police forces from Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, France, Sweden and Romania (AMERIPOL, 2023b). However, AMERIPOL lacked enough competences and resources to be a reference in police cooperation, not between LAC countries nor as a counterpart of Europol. EL PAcCTO programme has addressed these deficiencies, with the actions that are set out below.

In the political field, the programme has promoted the institutionalization of AMERIPOL. The constitutive summit of the organization was held in June 2022 in Santiago de Compostela, presided by the Spanish minister of Home Affairs. During the event, the minister declared that “Ameripol is the best partner of Europe in police bi-regional

cooperation”. The main topic discussed was the drafting of the institution's foundational treaty (FIIAPP, 2022a). In the technological field, the programme has helped to develop the Information Police System of AMERIPOL (SIPA) to facilitate the charging of data. The inauguration of the Data Center was finally held in October 2022 (FIIAPP, 2022b). Finally, EL PAcCTO has proposed the creation of Ameripol Network Fugitive Active Search Teams (ANFAST) inspired by the existing European Network Fugitive Active Search Teams (ENFAST) which aims at improving efficiency in tracing and arresting internationally wanted criminals (FIIAPP, 2019; Enfast, 2024).

Another important programme which has had a significant impact in the institution building process about drug policies between EU and LAC has been the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on drug policy (Copolad). This is a well-known programme, because it has existed since 2011 and it is currently on its third edition. It is led by the Spanish and Italian agencies for cooperation with Latin America, as well as the German Agency and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction as partners, with a budget of 15 million euros (Copolad, 2024a).

Copolad has the purpose to improve drug policies in the LAC region by promoting technical cooperation and political dialogue between its members and between them and the EU. It combines bi-regional and multi-cooperation spaces which intend to mobilize expertise to perform transformative policies to reduce drug supply and drug demand and fight for public health and citizen security (Copolad, 2024a).

Copolad has organized training courses, seminars and public awareness campaigns, and it has mobilized technical expertise, financed policy pilot projects and promoted different researches and studies (Copolad, 2024b). Nonetheless, the programme has also pursued an institution building effort: the financement of the National Drugs Observatories (NDOs) of the different LAC countries, in order to guarantee a good quality data collection to monitor and evaluate national policies about drugs (Copolad, 2024c).

In summary, the main instruments of cooperation against drug trafficking between the EU and the LAC region have not created new relevant institutions *per se*. Apart from the establishment of very sectoral working or technical groups, the cooperation has limited to supporting the existing institutions of LAC. Even so, these institutions could not have worked

properly without the financial and technical support from EL PAcCTO and Copolad programmes. In fact, these programmes ‘activated’ their functioning, by providing the organizations mentioned above with economic resources, expertise, technological tools and a legal framework. Despite being regional or national institutions, AMERIPOL and the NDOs are also composed of European experts and count on European countries or their police agencies as observers. This is because their reason for being is, indeed, cooperating with the EU and operating as Europol’s counterpart for a joint management of organized crime. Thereby, the author understands that in spite of the limitations identified, there is a *shared enterprise* between the EU and the LAC region against drug trafficking.

3.3 - Is there a mutual engagement between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking?

The purpose of this section is to explain why there is a *mutual engagement* between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking. As it was said in chapters 1 and 2, a *mutual engagement* is a dimension that allows continuous interactions, communication, and deliberations among a community’s members (Bueger, 2013, 302). This section explains why the EU-CELAC summits cannot be considered as such while the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs supported by Copolad and the Bi-regional Operational Task Force launched in 2022 thanks to EL PAcCTO are examples of *mutual engagement*. The results of the entire chapter are explained in the last page of this section.

The highest channels of communication between the EU and the LAC region to discuss possible partnerships are the EU-CELAC summits. Until now, three summits have been held: in 2013, in 2015 and in 2023. Despite the last of them included a debate about “combating organized crime in all its forms, including the illicit drug trade” and a call for renewing the “long-standing” EU-CELAC partnership with regular meetings (Michel & Gonsalves, 2023), these meetings are not a permanent and reliable structure to coordinate actions against drug trafficking at all.

Instead, there is the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs funded in 1995 to intensify political dialogue about the topic (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2024). It is

composed by the 27 EU member states and the 33 CELAC member states and functions through joint turn Euro-American presidencies, five-year political declarations, annual high level gatherings, semestral technical committees and monthly meetings of the Horizontal Working Group on Drugs between representatives of all the EU national drug agencies with CELAC countries' diplomats in Brussels. Since 2011, the Mechanism is backed by Copolad, which has established a focal point in Brussels, given technical support to the co-presidencies and provided logistical support and budget for accommodation and transport for the celebration of meetings (Copolad, 2024d).

Copolad has also strengthened the communication of the Mechanism with visibility and diffusion actions during the Latin American Drug Conference, the Brussels Crime Week, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction Conference (EMCDDA) and organized parallel events during the annual summits of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna (Copolad, 2024d). Consequently, the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs has been transformed into a true permanent channel of communication and coordination of the policies and strategies against drug trafficking between the EU and LAC.

In addition, EL PAcCTO proposed in October 2021 the creation of the Latin American Committee on Homeland Security (CLASI) to dispense a high level political dialogue space, where common priorities can be identified, shared pluriannual strategic plans can be drafted and consolidate AMERIPOL as the “single exchange body” of the region (EL PAcCTO, 2021). In March 2022, the CLASI was finally established with the support of the 27 EU member states and the membership of 7 LAC countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador and Panama (FIIAPP, 2022c). Afterwards, the committee was enlarged with the entrance of Chile, Colombia, Honduras, México, Paraguay, Perú and Uruguay (Municio, 2023). As a product of a joint EU-CLASI political declaration, the members of both organizations launched in October 2022 the Bi-regional Operational Task Force to combat drug trafficking, a network of police forces from the EU and LAC specialized in the fight against drug trafficking (EL PAcCTO, 2022c).

Consequently, it can be said that there are sufficient channels of communication to defend that there is *mutual engagement* between the EU and LAC in the field of the fight against drug trafficking. At least, we can identify the Mechanism and the Bi-regional Operational

Task Force, which are permanent structures which comprise EU and LAC countries. Although not all the LAC is represented in the Bi-regional Operational Task Force and it is still a very recent creation, the author wanted to mention two examples as evidence of the current trend to increase the cooperation complex between the EU and LAC in that issue.

3.4 - Summary of the findings

Firstly, the research has identified that there is a *shared repertoire* between the EU and LAC on combating illegal drug trafficking, backed by the examples of common databases, communication technologies and norms such as the CCPB, the COPANCOS system, the JITs, the REDCOPEN, the PALAS NET system and the Rules of Procedure of the Specialized Networks and Working Groups. Secondly, it has recognized a *shared enterprise*, backed by the examples of a common institution building project such as the support to AMERIPOL, the CLASI and the NDOs. Finally, it has pointed out a *mutual engagement*, backed by the examples of shared channels of communication such as the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, the GTEAP and the Bi-regional Operational Task Force.

Hence, the three characteristics of a community of practice, which were established by Etienne Wenger and had been applied to the analysis of International Relations by authors such as Emanuel Adler and Christian Bueger, have been found in this research. Therefore, we could affirm that there is a community of practice between the EU and LAC about the fight against illegal drug trafficking. In other words, the hypothesis is confirmed. In addition, we can also name which is the trend that the community is following: according to the data, it is increasing. Many of the examples which were mentioned did not exist four years ago. Others, such as AMERIPOL, the NDOs and the Mechanism, were officially established but lacked operational capacity before receiving the support of EL PAcCTO and Copolad. Furthermore, the budget of EL PAcCTO has been raised from 19 to 58 million euros from the first to the second edition (Cooperación española, 2023) and in the case of Copolad, it has increased from 10 to 19 million euros (Copolad II, 2024).

On the one hand, it could be said that this budget increase only shows the interest of the EU in cooperation with LAC about the topic. On the other hand, however, it is necessary to affirm that any of the programmes would have worked without the interest and involvement

of LAC countries. Actually, several examples of LAC countries taking the initiative were exposed in the previous pages. For instance, Panama and Costa Rica created the first CCPB (EL PAcCTO, 2022a) or Brazil shared its PALAS NET system with the other members of REDCOPEN in order to have an strengthened penitentiary cooperation (EL PAcCTO, 2024c). There is a true community spirit, a permanent ‘practice’ that fills cooperation between its members.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to remark on the main findings of the research and to expose its theoretical, methodological and practical relevance. To begin with, the conclusions will treat the limitations of this research. Afterwards, the chapter will recap the reasons that have led to a confirmation of the hypothesis and will outline the salience of the results that were obtained.

The research considered that EU-LAC cooperation in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking was a good example of interregional security cooperation and wanted to decipher its potentials and characteristics. In spite of the vast quantity of investigations that have been done about this type of cooperation, the research found that the literature about the topic needed an update in line with the intensification of relations between the EU and LAC. This represented an academic gap to be filled. Initially, the concept of a security regime was considered as a good tool for the analysis of this reality.

However, the research found that most of the applications of this concept were limited to analyze weaponry and war relations between formerly conflictive states and it lacked evidence on how to implement the original idea to an analysis about cooperation against illegal drug trafficking. Consequently, the analytical framework had to be reoriented into another theory, similar but with a broader scope and previous applications to the topic of drug trafficking: the concept of community of practice. On the one hand, the result was a good theoretical basis with a clear methodology that has allowed an accurate exposition and analysis of the current EU-LAC cooperation on the issue. On the other hand, unfortunately, this meant that the initial idea could not be carried out and the purpose of the research changed from trying to identify a ‘security regime’ to a ‘community of practice’.

Nevertheless, the new concept was backed by a consistent background of usage in the academy, in order to analyze a wide variety of issues in which organized crime is included. The choice of it allowed a proper analysis, which confirmed the new hypothesis and established that there is a community of practice between the EU and LAC in the field of the fight against illegal drug trafficking. On that account, this research has produced a new lens through which EU-LAC cooperation against organized crime can be observed in the future by other scholars.

Evidence from the numerous examples included in the two cases of study, the cooperation programmes EL PAcCTO and Copolad, has shown that the three characteristics of a community of practice are present in the EU-LAC cooperation mechanisms against illicit drug trade. A *shared repertoire* consisting of common databases, procedures, symbols and other tools against illegal drug trafficking exists. There is also a *shared enterprise* on the topic, consisting on the reinforcement of common institutions. Finally, both regions have a *mutual engagement* which is seen in the permanent and effective channels of communication and deliberation that they have. To sum up, this research argues that the EU and LAC conform to a community of practice in the field of cooperation against illegal drug trafficking.

The results of the analysis confirm the appropriateness of the concept of community of practice, as it was framed by Etienne Wenger and introduced into the toolbox of international political theory by Emanuel Adler, to study international cooperation on drug issues. Even so, this leads the path opened to fill a long term gap in the literature and search if this concept could contribute to theorize and interpret interregional cooperation efforts in general. Indeed, communities of practice are elements of socialization the identification of which can give substance to the main question of International Relations: why and how do states cooperate? In fact, our discipline of study was created in 1918 with the Woodrow Wilson cathedra with the objective of understanding the world and allowing states to have more rational behaviors. Nowadays, the field is still open for future scholars to answer our existential question and contribute to peacebuilding and problem-solving in the world.

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