



Facultat de Ciències Polítiques i de Sociologia

Grau en Relacions Internacionals

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Towards a community of practice?

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

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Illegal drug trafficking is a serious challenge to democratic societies. At the beginning of the 2010s decade, the annual turnover of illegal drug markets worldwide was estimated at \$1 trillion (Standing, 2010). In the European Union, the salience of this topic has been increasing and it is considered by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell as a threat to democracy, with criminal gangs causing half of the homicides in Latin America and importing violence dynamics from this region to Europe (Borrell, 2024). For this reason, the European Union is financing cooperation programmes that tackle the issue of the fight against illegal drug trafficking, such as the Programme for Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime (EL PAcCTO, 2024a) and the Cooperation Program between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug policy (Copolad, 2024a). The capabilities and resources of these programmes have increased, respectively, from 19 to 58 million euros (EEAS, 2018; Cooperación española, 2023) and from 10 to 15 million euros in their last editions (Copolad II, 2024; Copolad, 2024a).

Consequently, there is a gap in the literature which makes it necessary to analyze the emerging cooperation network between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean countries in the field of the fight against drug trafficking. Also, my research is conducted on this topic for democratic accountability reasons: to expose which are the mechanisms that are being created with our resources, which is the main objective of this thesis. A preliminary search on security cooperation through Google Scholar identified that the theory of ‘security regimes’ of Robert Jervis could be a useful instrument for the analysis.

Therefore, the initial purpose 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). However, during a more extensive literature review through Google Scholar in order to establish the analytical framework, it was found that the concept could not be applied to the study of cooperation against illegal drug trafficking, because it was traditionally linked to war and weaponry issues (see Nye Jr., 1987; Crawford, 1994).

In fact, Christian Bueger proposed a reinterpretation of the concept in his analysis about the African maritime security regime and introduced the notion of ‘community of practice’, as a better tool for the analysis of issues related with cooperation against organized crime (Bueger, 2013, 299). Communities of practice are “domains of knowledge that constitute communities of engaging practitioners bound by an interest in learning and performing shared practices” (Adler et al., 2024, 2). This concept was developed by the sociologist Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 1999) and introduced into the study of International Relations by Emanuel Adler, who has reinforced the theory recently (Adler et al., 2024). It has been used for the study of international cooperation about a variety of topics, including organized crime in the research of Christian Burger, so it has a solid appropriateness for the analysis of cooperation between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. Backed by these factors, the concept of community of practice was established as a tool for the analysis of this research.

Thus, the research question was: 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? After having concreted an analytical framework, the methodology was clarified with the operationalization of the three characteristics that compose a community of practice, according to Wegner and Adler: a *shared repertoire*, a *shared enterprise* and a *mutual engagement*. The research tried to identify these characteristics through two cases of study: EL PAcCTO and Copolad.

The characteristics were clearly found in the cases of study. There is a *shared repertoire* between the European Union and the Latin America and Caribbean consisting in common databases, procedures and communication technologies: the REDCOPEN, five Joint Investigation Teams and the Specialized Technical Group on Penitentiary Matters of Mercosur, among others. Also, there is also a *shared enterprise* in the common institution building process represented by the strengthening of AMERIPOL and the National Drug Observatories. Finally, there is a *mutual engagement* in permanent communications and deliberations through the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs and the e Bi-regional Operational Task Force.

Evidence shows, in consequence, that the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean conform to the characteristics of a community of practice when talking about cooperation against illegal drug trafficking. On the one hand, the findings were bittersweet because the scope of the research had to be readdressed due to the impossibility of applying the concept of security regime to the analysis, at least in its traditional meaning. On the other hand, however, the effort succeeded in a clear methodology that led to significant results: this research confirms the hypothesis. Hence, the suitability of the concept of community of practice for the study of international cooperation is consolidated, reinforcing the set of theories that try to answer the primary question of the discipline of International Relations: why and how do states cooperate? This research is a little sand grain to fill the gap.

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