

The Security and Prosperity Partnership And the Pitfalls of North American Regionalism

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to describe in detail the essence of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), interpreting it as an initiative to overcome disfunctionalities and shortcomings of previous international arrangements among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The SPP failed to deliver the results that its initiators had in mind; its outputs were limited in scope measured in terms of the issues tackled, joint policies, and regional regimes. It brought some policy integration into North America beyond economic issues, but did not transform itself into a regional governance mechanism that would bring about self-regulation norms and structures.

Key words: North American integration, regional governance, Security and Prosperity Partnership.

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende describir detalladamente la esencia de la Alianza para la Seguridad y la Prosperidad en América del Norte (ASPAN), a la cual interpreta como una iniciativa para encubrir las disfuncionalidades y deficiencias de los acuerdos previos entre Estados Unidos, Canadá y México. La ASPAN no pudo dar los resultados que sus iniciadores tenían en mente; en realidad éstos fueron limitados si se miden en términos de temas abordados, políticas conjuntas y creación de regímenes regionales. Sí trajo consigo cierto grado de integración de políticas públicas en Norteamérica más allá de los asuntos económicos, pero no llegó a ser un mecanismo de gobernanza regional que incluyera normas y estructuras de autorregulación.

Palabras clave: Integración norteamericana, gobernanza regional, Alianza para la Seguridad y la Prosperidad en América del Norte.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) emerged in the North American institutional landscape as a yet another device to organize and facilitate trilateral and bilateral relations with respect to the countries' economic and security interests. The creation of the SPP sparked many expectations and fears about the direction of regional integration because it seemed that the federal administrations were taking the initiative and had decided to play a more prominent role in governing the social and economic integration set in motion years ago. However, the SPP's organization and results proved wrong for both its opposition and supporters, exposing the various weaknesses of North American regionalism: 1) dominant power structures (at the regional, national, and bureaucratic level) that foster bilateralism rather than trilateralism; 2) a weak strategic vision or common ideology for successfully competing with neoliberalism as the basis for regional integration or with national socialist-based protectionism; and, 3) the lack of institutions to act as advocates of regional interests. Nevertheless, the results showed that not everything is gloom and doom, and, as in life, some aspects of regional politics do foster further policy integration without the political integration of the three states.

The Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America emerged in 2005 during the Waco summit. Three North American leaders launched the initiative, calling on their respective federal bureaucracies to seek greater and more intensive cooperation. In the beginning, it was heavily publicized and promoted in all three countries. In contrast, its tacit decline and final demise in 2009 passed unheralded, suggesting the decay of the SPP as a response to interdependence pressures and to relation-management shortcomings.

A lot has already been written about the causes and circumstances of the SPP's establishment and closure. It grew out of the structural changes in the global economy and security factors, including China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and subsequent growth, especially in the U.S. market—China replaced Mexico as a secondary U.S. trading partner—, and the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In addition, the SPP was influenced by changes in U.S. geopolitical strategy and domestic homeland security policy (Leycegui Gardoqui, 2012: 124-129; Benítez Manaut and Rodríguez Ulloa, 2005: 78-96; Velázquez Flores and Schiavon, 2008). Therefore, from this perspective, the SPP can be seen as a result of the efforts of Mexican, Canadian, and U.S. business-oriented actors (trade and economy departments and firms operating transnationally) to increase regional economic liberalization and competitiveness and make them a priority for the three countries. At the same time, it can be perceived as an effort to deal with security-related

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