The European Union and regional integration. A comparative perspective and lessons for the Americas


Abstract

Regional integration processes are meant to provide a peaceful arena in which sovereign countries voluntarily combine their efforts in areas of mutual concern, creating common regional interests and objectives. Models and ideas, however, do not always result in concrete actions or significant accomplishments. Even the most developed institutional exercise of regional integration, the European Union (EU), is commonly overwhelmed by the contradictions and obstacles of the institutional architecture and the interests of the member states. The construction of the EU has continued for more than five decades and remains an unfinished project. Despite its ebbs and flows, the assessment of the European integration process is positive and still at the forefront of regional integration experiences. In that regard, what lessons can be learned in the Americas from the European experience? What are the peculiarities and prospects of the integration processes in the Western Hemisphere? What are the conditions necessary for developing integration processes? Some ideas and responses to these questions are provided in the articles of this book, grouped in four sections: hemispheric integration, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America. The contributors demonstrate that integration in the sub-regions of the Americas has progressed in varying degrees, and that each integration process is characterized by particular circumstances that constrain further institutional developments, legitimacy and credibility. Regional integration in both Europe and the Americas is a work in progress, and therefore, scholarly exercises of the kind included in this book serve not only as a reflection and analysis of what currently exists and how it has developed, but also as a consideration for future developments.