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BOLIVARIAN FOREIGN POLICY: VENEZUELA´S INTERNATIONAL INSERTION DURING HUGO CHÁVEZ FRÍAS FIRST-TWO MANDATES (1999-2007)

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Introduction: Basis, objectives and periodization of the Bolivarian Foreign Policy

According to Romero (2006), the foreign policy presented during the administration of Hugo Chávez was characterized, among other dimensions, by the non-exclusively commercial use of hydrocarbons for the international projection of the country. According to the author, this characteristic put the so-called "Bolivarian diplomacy"[2] against the previous Venezuelan governments, since, from its beginnings and due to that specificity, the proposal sought the opposition to the *status quo* established in the regional and international levels.

In this sense, the initial understanding assumed by the Bolivarian government over international politics focused on denouncing and combating the [global] distribution of power. This position has already appeared in several documents from before the victory in the election, in which the political group led by Chavez blamed part of Venezuela´s underdevelopment Venezuelan on the so-called "powerful nations"[3]. Thus, when he assumed

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2 "Bolivarian Diplomacy" and "Bolivarian Foreign Policy" are the commonly used names (Romero 2006, Jácome 2011) to refer to the international actions undertook by the Venezuelan government after the election of Hugo Chavez in 1999. In this sense, this international dimension is the political project established internally, which was denominated "Bolivarian Revolution".

3 As it appears, for example, in the section on international conjuncture exposed in the docu-

the presidency, Chavez began to orient Venezuelan foreign policy, which was predominantly based on the struggle for the strengthening of multipolarity in International Relations.

This project was based on the diagnosis of the existence of only one pole of power in the International System (the United States), which in turn produced a disheartening scenario for other nations, since, unlike the bipolarity experienced during the Cold War, there was no counterbalance to the "neoliberalizing and globalizing" project disseminated by Washington. On this issue, Chávez stated in an interview to Foreign Affairs magazine:

> We must fight against a unipolar world and in favor of a new international order that has been talked about for decades, but that has remained in the speech. A fair, democratic, balanced international policy is indispensable. But to achieve this, we must contribute to the creation of this pluripolar world 4(tradução nossa).

Guided by that diagnosis, the initial actions of the Bolivarian foreign policy (BFP) intented to contribute to the articulation of alternative power poles in the international institutional framework built from the American hegemony. Chávez and his followers announced their commitment to the ideals of solidarity and Latin American unity expressed by Simón Bolívar in the mid-nineteenth century, which were recovered and fused to the situation of interdependence among nations in the contemporary international system. The Venezuelan president was therefore convinced that to overcome dependence and underdevelopment, it was essential to build a project and a collective strategy among his Latin American counterparts (Lander 2005).

However, such principles alone would not have meaning if they were not put into practice through concrete experiences. These, in turn, were linked to the domestic political situation, which influenced and guided the external commitments of a government that, from the beginning, was diplomatically active. Based on this interface, this article intends to emphasize the articulations between the two levels - internal and international - as a crucial element for the argumentative construction of the potentialities and weaknesses presented by Bolivarian diplomacy in its attempt to effectively contribute to the establishment of modifying practices of the status quo in the context of contemporary international relations.

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ment entitled "Alternative Bolivarian Agenda", which was published by the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200 in 1996, which can be accessed in full at: http://www.imprentanacional.gob.ve/web/libros/libros/Libro-Rojo-11-2-14-fs-web.pdf.

4 The interview, whose title is "Globalización: La enfermedad del nuevo milenio", can be accessed at: http://www.foreignaffairs-esp.org

In general, the performance of Venezuelan diplomacy during the first two presidential terms fulfilled by Hugo Chávez Frías was marked by two interstices in which a proactive and somewhat audacious stance was adopted, merged with a period in which the troubled domestic situation sharply halted its "internationalist impetus." Based on the detailed study of these three moments, this text aims to characterize and problematize the most relevant actions and foundations incorporated by the Bolivarians in the context of international politics.

The first diplomatic offensive (1999-2001)

The first moment of an outstanding performance on the part of the Bolivarian Diplomacy took place between 1999 and 2001, being characterized by the combination of an aggressive and blunt discourse that, in practice, remains diluted by the implementation of projects and more moderate initiatives. Initially, BFP had to follow up and fit into the broad program of institutional reconfigurations proposed by the new representative to the country. Thus, in line with the initial effort to articulate a constitutional process[5], which envisaged the "re-founding of the Republic," the position adopted by the new government in relation to the foreign policy previously established was also based on criticism and, consequently, on the need to substantial changes.

To that end, José Vicente Rangel, the first Bolivarian chancellor, focused his interventions and speeches on the argument that the foreign policy of the past did not respond to the interests of the Venezuelan people because it was too elitist. He added that Chávez's election clearly demonstrated the desire for drastic changes in national politics, which, of course, should also be extended to the management of international politics. Hence, the imperiousness of putting into practice an innovative, eminently sovereign and solidary diplomacy that was a faithful reflection of the transformations established in the internal structures of the nation for the benefit of the popular sectors (Boersner 2009).

Thus, in this initial moment, and in general terms, the Bolivarian government has striven to articulate and lead the group of Latin American countries committed to press for the establishment of international relations

5 Chávez's main political stance during the 1998 election campaign expressed the need for a complete overhaul of Venezuelan political institutions. In order to do so, it proposed to establish a constitutional process, which, through a plebiscite, was approved by the population as early as 1999. In a context in which 121 of the 131 constituents were Chavez's coreligionists, the country's new Constitution promulgated On December 15, 1999, mirrored, to a great extent, the government program presented by the Bolivarian leader.

and organizations centered on the principles of equity and solidarity, which, consequently, would help build a scenario of greater social justice in the region. Chávez, thus, emerged as the mainstay of the other rulers who made up the so-called Latin American "new left"[6] that ascended to power in the early years of the new millennium with platforms critical of the paradigm of neoliberal globalization.

In this sense, and in view of the negative [or not] profile of neoliberal principles, Chavez deliberately brought his diplomacy closer to the Latin American governments he considered "progressive"; In turn, he began to avoid alliances with the countries that, for the Bolivarian president, were run by "oligarchs" and therefore behaved like US officials on the regional scene. Such a position has, in the first instance, resulted in the weakening of bilateral relations with Colombia and Mexico, given their permissive and conciliatory positions vis-à-vis US interests in the region. On the other hand, there was a marked diplomatic rapprochement with Cuba (Boersner 2009).

In turn, with regard to international economic relations and especially the oil and trade policy signed during the first three years of the Bolivarian government, emerged two main strategies: the commitment to strengthen the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and also the effort to diversify the partners and the scope of Venezuelan foreign trade. Both strategies had as a common motivation the struggle to dampen the country's economic dependence on exports to the United States, so that the diplomatic corps was mobilized to partner with new trade consortiums around the world, as well as to strengthen existing links.

The Venezuelan President and his most prominent advisers were therefore firmly committed to working within the oil cartel with a view to rearticulate it and thereby to consolidate the necessary political force to undertake more systematic actions regarding fuel pricing in the international market. In addition to the extremely important objective price increase, given the characteristic rentier of the Venezuelan economy (Cicero 2015) - the struggle for OPEC's re-articulation also stood as an opportunity for BFP to present its "business card" in order to strengthen multipolarity in the International System.

6 Chávez's election in 1998 was the first in a series of victories of candidates considered "anti-neoliberal" in the Latin American political scene at the turn of the millennium. Whatever the specificities of each of these governments, there were important similarities among them, for example, the need to establish a "counter-agenda", based on the struggle for state sovereignty, international solidarity and the feasibility of collective mechanisms that aid in the endogenous development of these nations (Miranda 2012).

Even in the face of the political heterogeneity of the cartel[7] participants Chávez and the Venezuelan diplomatic apparatus succeeded in their goal and, from September 27th to 28th 2000, Caracas hosted the II OPEC Summit. At that time, most of the member countries were represented by their heads of state or by members of the bureaucratic high-ranking. The resulting document from the conference - the "Declaration of Caracas" - listed the agreements reached between the oil-exporting countries, which, among other deliberations, committed themselves to comply with the stable price[8] policy, to aggregate the tax on industrialized products as an essential component for the definition of the final selling price of the barrels and, also, to strengthen the cartel's institutional links.

In turn, with respect to the effort to diversify Venezuelan trading partners, the obtained results were conflicting. On the one hand, oil exports continued to be directed, in large measure, to traditional markets, especially to the United States. Of course, maintaining fuel supplies at levels similar to those registered in the period immediately prior to Chávez's inauguration was a key element in Washington's complacent posture before the speeches delivered by the Venezuelan leader (Illera 2005).

However, despite the aforementioned stability of trade flows in view of the United States, some diplomatic actions were carried out to geographically reorient not only the country's oil exports but also trade in non-rentier economic activities. Already at that time, China emerged as the nation with the greatest potential to establish, in practice, the deepening of relations with previously non-traditional consorts. In the same direction, BFP has instituted a number of actions aimed at intensifying trade relations with Europe and, from them, replacing the importation of US industrial inputs with capital goods from the "old world". The Venezuelan government also committed itself to granting more favorable tax and tax conditions to European companies that wanted to establish business in the South American country. This difference in the treatment was responsible for the significant drop in US investments in the country. In contrast, between 1999 and 2002, French in-

7 Among the members of OPEC is Saudi Arabia, whose royal family historically takes a conservative stance and averse to events that could serve as the stage for potentially disruptive discourses of the international *status quo*.

8 The proposal presented by the Venezuelans during the Summit and accepted by other members of OPEC was aimed at maintaining the price of a barrel of oil at the level of US $ 22 and US $ 28. The trade strategy to achieve such stability was based on the following mechanism: if the fuel value exceeded the $ 28 limit for more than 20 working days, the cartel countries would inject an additional 500 million barrels a day into the world market; In turn, if the price were below the minimum value established, the inverse measure would be adopted (Arriagada 2005).

vestments in Venezuela increased six-fold. In the same period, the volume of business carried out in the country by Swiss and German companies tripled (Hidalgo 2009).

Thus, having achieved successes in its initial two foreign policy objectives - the strengthening of OPEC and the diversification of the country's trading partners - the Bolivarian government gathered forces to continue positioning its strategy in 2001 with a view to multipolarity in the International System by not supporting the proposal of the hemispheric Free Trade Area (FTAA) presented by the US government.

This position was made during the Third Summit of the Americas held in Quebec, in which the Venezuelan diplomatic representation focused on defending two central points: first, the need for, also in International Relations, to extrapolate representative democracy, and thus to add to diplomatic practice elements that would enable citizens to participate directly in decision-making on policies that concern the sovereignty of their countries. Secondly, the imperative to oppose the urgency demanded by Washington in its strategy to consolidate the hemispheric free trade area as early as 2005, regardless of studies and broad debates on the positive and negative impacts that such initiative would bring to the Latin American economy. Such attitudes are expressed in the "Québec Declaration[9]", in which Venezuela "reserved its position" in relation to strictly representative democracy within the framework of the OAS, as well as to the maximum deadline of December 2005 for the entry into force of the FTAA agreement.

The first setback (2001-2003)

However, the first diplomatic offensive of the Bolivarian regime was halted and, to some extent, interrupted by serious instability in domestic politics experienced between the second half of 2001 and 2003. The institutional crisis occasioned by the incisive performance of opposition groups and organizations to the Chávez government caused, during this period, numerous damages to the country, which were also felt in Venezuelan businesses and political activities signed internationally (Romero 2010).

In this sense, even more than the ephemeral coup d'état in April 2002, the articulation of the "Paro Petrolero"[10] was the action that represent-

9 The final document prepared by the participating countries in this meeting can be accessed in full at http://www.ftaa-alca.org/summits/quebec.

10 The political events called "*Paro Petrolero*" consisted in the stoppage of labor and economic activities by a significant portion of the population as a way of expressing their discontent with the government headed by Hugo Chávez. The economic devastation generated by the shut-

ed, at least in the sphere of foreign policy, the greatest obstacle to the country during that troubled period. In addition to the commercial losses imposed on the country, the drastic decrease in the production and commercialization of Venezuelan fuel due to the sabotage of PDVSA's activities also generated instability in international capitalist production, as the industrialized countries were suddenly left out of access to an important reserve of hydrocarbons. To make the scenario even more disheartening for the latter, the paralysis of Venezuelan production occurred concurrently with another time of great political tension - the invasion of Iraq by the United States - a situation that also greatly impacted the international oil trade.

In view of this situation, the resolution of the Venezuelan oil impasse was taken as a priority by the international community, which played a decisive role during the process that finally ended the *lock-out*. To that end, two political leaders played a key role: former US President Jimmy Carter, who shortly after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2002, offered himself to mediate the conflict between the Bolivarian government and the opposition; In turn, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva - recently installed president of Brazil - jointly with the leaders of Chile, Mexico, Spain, Portugal and the United States, created the "Group of Venezuela's Friends", which succeeded in appeasing the clashes by proposing to hold a recall referendum as a mechanism to resolve the controversy (Boersner 2009).

Chávez's victory in the referendum[11] coincided with the robust rise in oil prices in the international market. Consequently, Venezuelan tax receipts rose as well. The new scenario, internally, allowed the Bolivarian government to promote the expansion of public expenditures, which were directed primarily to finance a series of social programs - the so-called "*Misiones Bolivarianas*" - that were then built (Cicero 2010).

At the international level, the rise in the price of the barrel of oil also provided a resumption of the proactive stance on the part of the Caribbean country, which had the necessary material conditions to articulate more assertive and direct diplomatic actions. Here, again attesting to the rentier characteristic of the model of economic development practiced in Venezuela, it is fundamental to emphasize the importance and the role of "guarantor" exercised by the oil in the process. It was, undoubtedly, the condition of a hydrocarbons exporting country that gave much of the resources needed to

down culminated in the 27% drop in Venezuelan GDP during the first quarter of 2003 (Vera 2005).

11 After a troubled process of collection of signatures by political parties and organizations opposing Bolivarianism, on August 15, 2004, the litigation occurred, and its final result, by a margin of 58.25% against 41.74%, favored Hugo Chávez Frías.

finance the most auspicious projects ever implemented. Thus, as will be detailed in the next section, without such contributions from the international hydrocarbons trade, the regional integration projects proposed by the BFP and focused on the non-exclusively commercial use of oil as an instrument of foreign policy could hardly have left the paper.

The second diplomatic offensive (2004-2007)

The period beginning in 2004 and extending through 2007 is characterized by the intense performance of BFP in the international context, and especially in the inter-American scenario. During this time, given the excellent economic conditions provided by the boom in oil prices that characterized those years, Bolivarian diplomacy made the international insertion of the country more complex and multifaceted. Venezuela has from them on adopted a proactive and determined posture to make "social development" a priority on the agenda of its international relations.

The two main regional initiatives created by the Venezuelan enterprise in this period - the "Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas" and its articulation in the energy sector, the "PetroAmerica" project - will be detailed in order to add another dimension to the analysis on how the condition of oil-exporting country shaped the choices and action of Venezuelan foreign policy.

ALBA: Regional Integration beyond the economy

About ALBA, at the outset, it is important to point out that such an initiative was articulated in order to try to break with the trajectory hitherto instituted by the other Latin American and Caribbean integration projects, whose apex, at that moment, was materialized in the framework of the FTAA negotiations. In addition to important differences in relation to the countries that would comprise it - including Cuba[12] and excluding the US and Canada - ALBA emerged as an alternative to the model of hemispheric trade integration orchestrated by the United States precisely because it contradicted the

12 Cuba's participation in the ALBA framework is a good example to portray the uniqueness of the proposed integration presented by the Bolivarian alternative. Under the terms of the agreement, the Caribbean island enjoys important commercial benefits provided by the Venezuelans, who in turn are aware of the economic difficulties faced by Cuba and, therefore, take action to help the neighboring country. As a counterpart to the assistance provided, from programs designed under the auspices of ALBA, Cubans provide a remarkable number of qualified professionals designated to work especially in the areas of health and education in Venezuela and in the other countries that have joined the initiative.

emphasis that this proposal gave to the neoliberal assumptions in driving the process.

In turn, the Bolivarian integration project is predominantly based on struggles against poverty and against social exclusion through the adoption of equitable strategies of cooperation among nations. In general terms, and taking Villa's argument (2007, 42), it can be said that "Venezuela conceives an integration process on bases not only economic, but also profoundly political."

Therefore, in view of the principles and guidelines to be exercised within the framework of ALBA, it is proposed to build a system capable of combating asymmetries and catalyzing endogenous national and regional development, which would help mitigate latent social inequalities in the Latin American context. In this sense, it is extracted from its constitutive documents[13] that the integration principles proposed by the initiative are solidarity, complementarity and compensatory financing to tackle asymmetries and differential treatment between countries according to the circumstances.

In order to materialize them, the proposed actions are concentrated in three main cores, namely: to provide financing for both commercial and infrastructural activities and to reduce the budgetary commitment resulting from the import of energy by the countries of the bloc; invest directly in social projects, especially in the areas of health and education; And enter into trade agreements not based exclusively on material/financial reciprocity[14].

In this sense, rather than a direct contraposition to the principles and mechanisms envisioned by the initiative of regional integration proposed by the Americans, ALBA also substantiated an opposition to neoliberal globalization established in the inter-American scenario. Such assertive stance is justified because previously mentioned constitutive documents consider asymmetric trade relations between developed and developing countries as a central obstacle that greatly hampers the eradication of poverty in the latter. To remedy this situation, the Bolivarian alternative encourages preferential treatment for both the nations and the less privileged social sectors that are

13 Such information is contained in the official document entitled "What is ALBA", available at http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/pdf/alba_mice_en.pdf.

14 Non-reciprocity and compensatory trade (through direct exchange of products) are the two main ways in which the principles of fair exchange and differential treatment are applied in the context of ALBA. In addition, trade agreements are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, allowing flexibility to remedy specific difficulties according to the circumstances of each country. In this sense, for example, Cuba agreed to guarantee duty free access to Venezuelan imports, as well as to remove all non-tariff barriers; Venezuela, in return, eliminated only non-tariff barriers (Girvan 2008).

part of them. This position is firmly established by the need to address the trade discrepancies caused by the deterioration of the terms of trade, which potentialize the situation of endemic poverty faced by so-called "peripheral countries".

Through ALBA, the BFP's intention of leading a regional integration process based on the protagonism of issues related to economic development and social justice was consolidated, as well as the appreciation of Latin American culture and traditions, fundamentally, from the resumption of Simón Bolívar's political heritage (Altmann 2009). This proposal reverberated with relative success in the regional context and, after a decade of its foundation, the International Organization is composed of eight nations (Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela).

Regarding its members, it is important to emphasize the low level of industrialization presented by them, a situation that makes them continue dependent, even participating in the initiative, on exports of low value-added products, which are mostly transacted with the industrialized countries. Such dynamic is perverse for the concrete advance of the ALBA's contest practice, since the persistence of unequal trade flows between central and peripheral countries translates into one of the factors that contribute most to the maintenance of inequality in international economic relations.

"Diplomacy of Petroleum" in Bolivarian times

As for the materialization of the initiatives signed within the framework of ALBA, it is worth mentioning here the efforts made by the Venezuelan foreign policy apparatus to assert itself as the main economic asset of the country for the development, catalyzing or deepening the intra-MERCOSUR political-commercial relations. Thus, a broad strategy, historically used by the Caribbean industry to enhance its international insertion was rebuilt: the so-called "petroleum diplomacy"[15].

Specifically in the context of ALBA, this mechanism was embodied

15 According to Poetner (2011: 87), the foreign policy strategy known as "oil diplomacy" can take on two facets, namely: "one is the result of applying force and hegemony to control this energy resource [oil]; the other is the open and arbitrary use of oil wealth to influence events in other countries. The first situation revolves around the creation of domination and subordination between countries through the control of oil resources. The dependence of oil-importing countries may be further reinforced if they are sold at preferential prices or term. The second situation focuses on the current exercise of the power of wealth in order to gain influence and power over other states by acting directly on their governments or on opposition groups or movements".

through the implementation of the "PetroAmerica Project", which proposes, in general terms, to promote and deepen energy integration among Latin American countries. On the current political scenario that determines the progress [or not] of this process, Fuser considers (2011, 01):

> Few ideas are able to mobilize such unanimous support from South American political and business leaderships as for the need for greater energy integration among the countries of the region [...] Energy integration is presented, consensually, as a necessary and a possible goal.

In this sense, and benefiting itself from the political scenario described above, BFP sought to promote regional energy coordination in order to, given the abundance of resources available to Venezuelans, coordinate and leverage fuel supply to neighbors, especially the Caribbean and Central American ones.

In doing so, in addition to making the sale of oil, the Chavez-led government also consolidated its political influence in the regional context, inasmuch as energy integration, as proposed, represented a "good deal" for the importers of oil. Thus, the interdependence largely due to the hydrocarbons trade gave the necessary conditions for BFP to assume, in that moment, the innovative and combative posture that, among other initiatives, managed to articulate ALBA itself, which, Its flagrant weaknesses, represents an important Bolivarian contribution in its attempt to strengthen multipolarity in the International System.

In this context, PetroAmerica represents, in turn, an initiative for energy integration under the auspices of ALBA. According to PDVSA's non-electronic exhibition, "a PetroAmerica is a proposal for energy integration of the continent's people in the ALBA," which is "based on the principles of solidarity and complementarity of countries, not just the democratic resource of the people", and it is conceived as a "geopolitical enabler guided towards establishing mechanisms of cooperation and integration for the energy resources of the Caribbean regions, for Central and South America as a basis for a socioeconomic of the people of the continent".[16]

The set of actions that comprise PetroAmerica therefore constitute, therefore, an important part of the petroleum policy practiced by BFP, which, based on an integrationist proposal, aims, essentially, to value the commercial and political interests of the Latin American countries with regard to the control and sovereignty over its energy resources. Thus, practices such as the

16 Free translation of the guidelines at http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenuprinc.tpl.html&newsid_temas=46.

sale of oil below market price and the consolidation of financing channels for politically aligned countries have become the mechanisms used to operationalize the "Bolivarian petrodiplomacy". Through the initial approximation of agreements made in the energy field, Venezuelans sought to gather allies for their demands and proposals articulated in the International System, as well as instigated the creation of new International Organizations based on innovative principles adverse to US influence, with ALBA being the best-finished example of this effort (Cicero 2015).

In practice, the plan essentially seeks to promote the integration of Latin American and Caribbean state energy companies to implement agreements and joint investments in activities related to the exploration and commercialization of hydrocarbons. In this sense, the proposal gives a strategic importance to the sector, with a view to integrating the establishment of multilevel governance of energy resources at the hemispheric level, so as to ensure coordinated action among the participants, as well as the planning and assessment of long-term challenges and needs (Jácome 2011).

In order to achieve these objectives, there was a focus on the synergy of knowledge, material capacity and experience accumulated by public companies throughout their specific trajectories in the negotiations involving the exploration, purchase and distribution of hydrocarbons. On the reason for being of the complementary initiative Ruiz-Caro (2006, 24):

> The agreements in PetroAmerica involve the integration of state energy companies in Latin America and the Caribbean to implement agreements and joint investments in the exploration, exploitation and commercialization of oil and natural gas [...] Such actions are part of the current Venezuelan policy that aims to favor all neighboring countries by buying in the region instead of resorting to the 'first world'.

The Venezuelan proposal was initially formulated aiming at the founding of a single company, which would bring together the state hydrocarbon companies of the region. To the extent, however, that the difficulties to materialize such negotiations were presented, changes were made in the integration mechanisms, with the prioritization of sub-regional agreements, each with its own characteristics and specificities, which made possible the effectiveness of actions.

The first step in this sense was taken on October 19th 2000, when, in the city of Caracas, it was signed or "Energy Cooperation Agreement"[17] (ECA).

17 The Agreement can be read in its entirety at: http://www.sela.org/media/2087691/di-6-evolucion-petrocaribe-esp.pdf.

At that time, representatives of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic signed bilateral agreements for the purchase of hydrocarbons from Venezuela. An intention was also announced to extend the conditions to all other countries that requested and that, in the judgment of the Bolivarian diplomacy, to the necessary characteristics to appear as beneficiaries of the treaty.

It provided for the sale of crude oil or refined by-products with a fifteen-year term for the amortization of the purchase and sale contracts, in addition to a grace period of up to one year and an interest rate of not more than 2% year. In this sense, the ten agreements only varied in relation to the volume of Venezuelan oil available to the countries, which is calculated according to the specific characteristics, energy structure and consumption of each nation. The terms of trade offered by the Venezuelans were the same for all buyers.

The "Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement" (CCA) signed with Cuba, in 2002, was also added to this set of negotiations. While the latter is still in force, the ECA was absorbed by the "PetroAmerica" initiative, which still offers commercial conditions more favorable to the oil exchange involving the Central American and Caribbean nations.

Since 2004, benefited by internal political stability, the recovery in the international prices of hydrocarbons and after the successful consolidation of the ECA, Bolivarian diplomacy has enjoyed a favorable political-economic scenario to invest even more in the deepening of its international initiatives. Thus, based on the oil boom and the institutional "boom" of the Bolivarian Revolution - materialized by the conquest of all the seats of the National Congress in the legislative elections of December 2005 - the position adopted by BFP was proactive in promoting regional energy integration to qualify the country's participation in the inter-American scenario.

Specifically, as a milestone in this rescheduling of the Bolivarian international insertion, important efforts were made to implement the "PetroAmerica" project in practice. As a result of this strategy, there were three sub-regional energy integration initiatives: "PetroSur", "PetroAndina" and "PetroCaribe". After a decade of activities, these projects presented disparate results. While the first two did not advance satisfactorily - for a number of reasons, which were exposed and problematized in another paper (Cicero 2015) - "PetroCaribe" achieved significant achievements, which will be briefly outlined below.

"PetroCaribe": energy and social integration

This initiative, established on June 29 2005, on the occasion of the signing of the "Agreement on the Energy Cooperation of Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean"[18], counts, until the present date, on the participation of the following States: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Suriname. The action is conceived as an incubator of policies and projects linked to the energy sector, which aims to promote the integration of Central American and Caribbean countries both through the use of natural resources and through the political coordination of relations among its members.

In general terms, the main objective that led to the integration between these nations was the intention to articulate public policies related to the energy issue to facilitate commercial complementarity and political narrowing among the group. For this, the proposal is based on two fundamental pillars: first, in the solidarity of a surplus energy state - Venezuela - with countries with few sources and energy resources; And second, in the recognition of the asymmetries between the levels of economic development presented by the nations involved and the intention to mitigate them (Girvan 2008).

It is hoped, therefore, to promote regional integration guided by the principles of unity, cooperation, complementarity and socio-economic development. From these bases, the Bolivarian government, in the first ten years of PetroCaribe's activities, estimated that it financed the amount of 200,000 barrels per day of fuel under the initiative, a figure that alone significantly exceeded the cooperation offered by the developed countries within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals proposed by the United Nations (Ruiz-Caro 2006).

In this sense, the "PetroCaribe" project fulfilled the innovations advocated by the BFP in the field of energy cooperation, insofar as the strictly commercial sphere was extrapolated to include in its role of competence actions such as: the planning of the energy policy of the country-members, from the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the available deposits until transportation to the consumer market; the construction of new plants to refine and store the fuel; to urge the development of the petrochemical industry and to finance the necessary training and technological assistance to guarantee the efficiency

18 The Agreement can be fully conferred at: http://www.sela.org/attach/258/EDOCS/SRed/2013/09/T023600Di_No._3_Cooperacion_Acuerdo_PETROCARIBE- Final_doc_Rev__21-8-13.pdf.

of the commercial activity; articulate and promote the establishment of state-owned energy companies in countries where they do not exist[19].

Respecting, therefore, the same integrationist *logic* proposed under the "umbrella" project (comprehensive) PetroAmerica, the Caribbean initiative is characterized by going beyond of the commercial foundation. This particularity, however, does not annul the attractions offered in this area, insofar as PetroCaribe allows the importing countries of the Venezuelan fuel several economic advantages. Under the other benefits, the agreement will give the former a grace period of up to two years to pay their hydrocarbon consumption, as well as expresses the Venezuelan commitment to unilaterally bear the costs of installing the necessary infrastructure to carry out and qualify the commercial practice through, for example, the construction of refineries in Cuba and Jamaica.

In addition, in order to operationalize the according PetroCaribe, the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA founded a subsidiary company, **PDV Caribe S.A.** The activities carried out by the company are focused on the materialization of contracts and the logistical support necessary for the implementation of the regional integration initiative. About the purposes of the new company, complements Jácome (2011, 05):

> Currently Pdvsa sells crude and its derivatives on credit and receiving countries have up to 25 years to pay, with an interest rate of 2% if the barrel is less than $40 and 1% if it exceeds that figure. The signatories receive the products with a financing of 40% when the price exceeds 50 dollars, 50% if it is above 80 and 60% when it reaches 100 dollars or more.

In other words, in view of these conditions, the statement by Óscar Arias, then president of Costa Rica, did not come as a surprise, and in the course of the [unsatisfactory] negotiations aimed at the inclusion of the Central American country in PetroCaribe, publicly stated in an official visit to the European Union that the credits and resources for cooperation provided by the Venezuelans to the region amounted to four times the amount offered by the Americans. On the basis of IMF calculations, in countries such as Guyana, Jamaica and Nicaragua, the volume of financing obtained through the programs linked to PetroCaribe amounted to between 4% and 5% of the GNP of these nations (Altmann 2009).

Thus, with regard specifically to the country's energy integration

19 Objectives set out in the Cooperation Agreement.

policy 2007 was especially beneficial in view of the fact that PetroCaribe members concluded negotiations that not only reaffirmed efforts for energy integration between the signatory states, but also, have expanded their scope of action towards the principle of social development. To that end, among other deliberations, the agreement was formalized according to which the initiative should transcend the energy scope to place itself in the spaces of productive integration and social development through actions such as: the establishment of agreements for the purchase of originating products from the least developed countries (poultry, fishery, sugar and banana production, among others) by the countries with the highest relative development; the construction of hotel infrastructure for the joint exploration of tourism; the articulation and implementation of common social programs to improve their impact, as well as the joint development of air and sea transport as an indispensable requirement for the implementation of integration.[20]

Final Considerations

Considering the arguments presented here - which sought to portray, fundamentally, the impacts of the international hydrocarbons trade on the articulation and practice of foreign policy carried out during the first two mandates fulfilled by Hugo Chavez - it is possible to identify in this a pattern of relatively stable behavior, that is, the use of the so-called "petroleum diplomacy" as the promoter of an integrationist proposal that has discontinued the one practiced during the period of neoliberal hegemony in our region. In the same sense, the present study emphasizes that, due to its rentier economic structure, the country has a very unstable position in the context of international economic relations today, in that its strengths and weaknesses are mostly linked to the, sometimes expressive, sometimes insufficient, resources obtained from the sale of oil.

Thus, if within the internal scope the Bolivarian government did not achieve the necessary conditions to dismantle the network commanded by the transnational corporations involved in the exploitation of Venezuelan hydrocarbons (Cicero 2015), Chávez and his co-religionists had a little more room for maneuver, however limited, when taking part in international politics. In this logic, during the non-rare boom periods (notably at the beginning of the

20 The declaration where these proposals are presented is available at: http://www.granma.cu/granmad/secciones/petrocaribe/cumbres-cel/acuerdo-3.html.

term, through the re-articulation of OPEC, and for much of its second presidential term), Venezuela, once again in its recent history, has put into practice the "petroleum diplomacy" to increase and qualify its political-economic insertion in international relations.

As a result, by using the "PetroAmerica" project - an ambitious regional energy integration initiative, which is well-articulated to the innovative proposal put forward by ALBA - BFP, backed by petrodollars, has made significant progress in expanding its commercial presence and its political weight in inter-American relations. A limited, but relevant, contribution was made by the Bolivarians to the cooling of US hegemony and, consequently, to the attempt to promote the multipolar rearticulation of power relations in the International System.

On the other hand, even in those moments - and even more so in those cases which the oil prices were falling, as in 2009, for example - the capacity to sustainably qualify and expand the international insertion of the Bolivarian proposal was mitigated by the political-economic ties imposed on a peripheral country such as Venezuela in the context of the international division of labor.

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ABSTRACT
The article investigates, in three stages, the Venezuelan foreign policy exercised between 1999 and 2007. Initially, efforts were made to strengthen OPEC. Yet, between 2001 and 2003, the internal political crisis had a negative impact on the international insertion sought by the Venezuelans. Finally, between 2004 and 2007, the initial proactive approach was taken based on "diplomacy of oil."

KEYWORDS
Foreign Policy; Venezuela; Petroleum.

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