

# *Bolivia's contribution to MERCOSUR*

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By María Josefina Arce

The Sixty-third Summit of the heads of state of MERCOSUR, Common Market of the South, will take place on the 7th in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, in the midst of good news. Bolivia has become a full member of this integrationist mechanism, which also includes Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Last week, the Brazilian Chamber of Senators approved the Protocol of Accession of Bolivia, which has had the status of associated country since 2015. The Chamber of Deputies had already done so last October.

This was the last requirement for the full participation of the Plurinational State and had remained in oblivion during the government of President Jair Bolsonaro, who never bet on the integration of the nations of the area.

The legislative bodies of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay had already complied with this provision. Now the South American country will have a period of 4 years to conclude the formal accession step, through the gradual adoption of all the rules of the bloc.

Bolivia has much to contribute to this mechanism, created in 1991, which promotes the free circulation of goods and services among member nations and their insertion into the world economy.

The Andean nation, as experts have stressed, can contribute in energy and economic matters, given its position as one of the region's most developed economies in recent years.

Since 2006, with the coming to power of MÁS, Movement Towards Socialism, Bolivia has maintained a sustained Gross Domestic Product growth of over 4% and has registered a notable reduction in poverty.

The expert Gabriel Villalta, quoted by the news agency Sputnik, highlighted the potential of La Paz beyond gas exports, such as the production of value added wealth of lithium, a fundamental mineral for the manufacture of electric batteries and, therefore, one of today's strategic natural resources.

The lithium reserve in Bolivian territory is the largest in the world, with 23 million tons.

The plurinational state can also contribute to the mechanism its experience as a member of the Andean Community of Nations, of which it has been a member since its constitution in 1969 and in which it actively participates.

Bolivia's full membership in MERCOSUR will be beneficial both for that nation and for the bloc with a population of almost 300 million people.

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