

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Ulrika" a Norwegian woman asks the protagonist what it means to be a Colombian, to which the latter replies: "It is an act of faith." This anecdote illustrates how the Ibero-American community has so far been an emotional reality rather than an area of cooperation and constructive dialogue. An emotional reality that, even after a long history of fruitless attempts at self-realization, has unquestionably preserved the motives that gave it origin and purpose.

For the idea of community to exist, its members must participate on the basis of backgrounds assumed to be their own, but that are at the same time distinct from others. In the case of the Ibero-American community, these elements are rooted in the undeniable substratum of common culture and shared historical legacy.

What is currently taking place within this community? In the last few years the consolidation of regional economic blocs seems to point to an international situation in which established mediation and cooperation groups are losing ground and purpose.

Spain and Portugal have been integrated into the European Community. Sub-regional agreements, such as Mercosur, the Andean Pact, the Cartagena Agreement, have been established in the South. Central America is establishing its own system of integration, and Mexico has successfully concluded negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with its northern neighbors. All display gravitation toward exclusive regional definitions.

Taken together, this would mean a *coup de grace* to the political viability of an Ibero-American community. Nevertheless, though paradoxically, in this context the idea and the need to achieve political articulation of the vast and contradictory flow that nourishes Ibero-American cultural identity begin to be visible.

The first and fundamental step in this direction was taken in 1991 when, for the first time in history, the twenty-one heads of state and government of the countries constituting the Ibero-American community met in Guadalajara, Mexico.

What is known as the Guadalajara Summit became the concrete expression of the search for better communication between the members of the community, the creation of a network of integration and discussion around the diverse problems that face them: respect for international law, and sovereignty, peaceful conflict solution and the broadening of mutual concern for democracy, economic and social development, the environment, technology and culture.

The Guadalajara meeting was not intended to exclude other steps toward integration, whether regional or extra-regional, but to strengthen them as well as to establish a dialogue with other regions.

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From the spirit to the letter: the Second Ibero-American Summit

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The Second Ibero-American Summit was held in Madrid a year later, on July 22 and 23, 1992, thereby consolidating this forum and confirming that its agreements will be backed by political will and translated into specific action.

Not all heads of state and government were present on this occasion. The absence of some of them emphasizes the need for sustained political and economic cooperation between the forum's members. Hence the first benefit to be noted is the resolution by those present to work positively toward solutions to problems such as the instability of democratic institutions, drug trafficking and terrorism.

It should be emphasized that there has been a significant change from the First to the Second Summit. What clearly came out of the Guadalajara Summit was a declaration of principles and intentions. Its importance was that an agreement had been reached regarding the problems to be faced, clearly the first step toward action.

The Madrid Summit took a step beyond the declarative stage to the definition of cooperative programs



AP.

Ibero-American Summit leaders mingle minutes before the official photo.

that are already in operation. The principal areas of action are in the sphere of education and culture. It is no accident that these are the first issues to be addressed, for they are precisely where the earliest historical paths and shared values exist, suggesting the defense of cultural identity against the flattening effect of globalization. At the same time, these programs require a realistic awareness of the need for greater competitiveness in the global context.

Social and human development is the second area where specific goals have been defined. The end of bipolarity has once more brought inequalities between North and South into sharp focus. It is particularly important for Latin America to develop forms of cooperation that rapidly address the area's most pressing problems. The signing of the agreement to establish the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean is particularly significant in this respect.

In conjunction with these specific agreements, provision for the respect and preservation of sovereignty in accordance with the rules of international law as the principle that should regulate relations among the nations of the community was universally accepted. In this sense, the heads of state and government undertook to condemn any judicial decision that violated these principles.

Finally, though the participating nations differ greatly in terms of ideology, and political and economic development, they have reached specific agreements on common problems and established new forms of mutual support.

But its most important achievement is that the Ibero-American Summit has established itself as a forum for political mediation whose implications go beyond the Ibero-American sphere to relevance for the international community as a whole.

It is to be hoped that the answer to Borges' question will soon cease to be so devastating ❖

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