

End of the century trends

Hugo B. Margáin*

Two well-defined trends are evident in the world at the close of this century: on the one hand, nationalisms have become more acute, as manifest in the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. On the other is the trend toward the formation of blocs of nations voluntarily united for economic reasons, as in the creation of the European Community.

The speed and depth of world change concerns us all, for they are not alien to our hemisphere. The predominant tendency is obvious in the regionalization or globalization of the northern part of our continent. The future centers on free trade between the US, Canada and Mexico, a first step toward the integration of our entire hemisphere.

The vigorous shift began in this century after the First World War. First, diverse states were formed, based on racial, cultural, linguistic and territorial union. Nationalism divided the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Treaty of Versailles (1918) gave birth to a number of nations.

At the same time, a trend opposed to national isolation began to gain ground, opening the way for negotiated settlements. These were freely accepted by various states in the interest of forming broader-than-national markets, thereby spurring development.

Two small states, Belgium and Luxembourg, merged in 1921. Later, in 1944, in the light of their excellent results, they were joined by the Netherlands, forming the Benelux group.

This was the starting point for a more extensive European market. The economic results achieved by the Benelux nations drew considerable attention. Their commercial, industrial and financial sectors grew rapidly, something each country could not have achieved by itself.

France and Germany arranged to share coal and steel from the Saar region, a cause of bitter controversy between them in the past. Robert Shuman and Jean Monnet, authors of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the basis for the European Common Market, were inspired by the Saarbrücken and Benelux experiences. It is clear that European integration aspires not only to economic union, but to political and monetary union as well.

Free movement of capital now exists in Europe, so that the investor can place it wherever he chooses. Products may be exported without tariffs, and workers have the freedom to offer their services wherever they wish, in any of the European Common Market countries.

The arrangements that statesmen made to create this common market have not only accelerated development, but have also managed to eliminate economic war, the prelude to wars that solve nothing and leave a colossal balance of death and destruction such as the world suffered during the two so-called world wars of this century.

Economic blocs tend toward free internal trade among group members and protectionism against outsiders, in other words, the rest of the world.

European imports from our region, that were essential years ago, can now be done without. They do not

need us. This is one of the reasons for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico, as well as for plans for hemispheric integration.

Attempts at unification by means of armed force have failed in the past, as did the Pan-Europe aspired to by Napoleon, and in this century, the Pan-Germanic zeal of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Meanwhile, grouping by negotiation and mutual respect have continued to work peacefully and have become increasingly enriched.

In this context, Mexico is in favor of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The European Community has been achieved in spite of rivers of blood shed during its endemic wars, in spite of the different languages of its various member states, in spite of pronounced racial differences, in spite of asymmetry in development, and in spite of the egoism and defensive attitudes of the past.

Armed conflicts have been rarer on our continent, in comparison with Europe. English is spoken in the North, along with French in part of Canada, and Spanish and Portuguese predominant in the rest of the continent. The American hemisphere's linguistic advantage over Europe is obvious, whereas multiple and profound cultural differences exist in Europe.

In contrast, we have predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Ibero-American-Indigenous cultures. The two ought to be able to get along by virtue of the teachings of classical Greece, common to them all. The key lies in reason, the *logos* that respects

* Editorial Director.

plurality and national sovereignties. Reason prevails over both the strong and the weak. All should live under its sway, in a civilized world.

Another transcendent reality produced in the second half of this century is the United Nations, a global organization created after the Second World War.

The first attempt to bring international conflicts to debate and resolution before multinational organizations, was the League of Nations, generally accepted during the sessions devoted to the Treaty of Versailles (1918). But the United States did not become part of the League that President Wilson proposed in Europe. The US Senate voted against it.

The United Nations, taking full advantage of its predecessor's experience, has grown stronger in its many years of activity from 1945 to the present. This international organization can be improved if we put democratic principles to work.

Veto power in the Security Council is reserved to the nations that won the Second World War. That privilege should disappear in keeping with the principal of equality among the member states of the United Nations.

World affairs should be resolved in the UN. No single nation should unilaterally lead the world now that the cold war has ended and one of the bipolar rivals has disappeared.

The arms race of the cold war era, now coming to an end, was profoundly damaging. Investing world resources in arms deepened the misery and ignorance of the planet, and caused serious economic crises.

The peaceful resolution of disputes in the UN is the key to peace. We need to be resolute in applying the principle of international cooperation for development, and in supporting progress in culture and education worldwide; in illuminating consciences; in guiding men and

women to their higher destiny. We must increase the number of schools throughout the world.

In 1986 a commission was set up, composed of twenty experts from Mexico and the US, charged with studying the future of relations between our two countries. It was the first time Mexicans and Americans sat down to study and debate our main bilateral problems together.

After two and a half years of work, the commission's report was presented to Presidents-Elect Bush and Salinas in November 1988. A simultaneous change of presidents occurs in our two countries once every twelve years.

The binational commission's proposals were accepted by both sides. The issues studied were: the nature of bilateral relations, the economy (debt, trade, and investment), migration, drug problems, foreign policy and interstate relations, and new understanding through education.

The report influenced the UN meeting in Vienna that same year (1988), where a worldwide document against drug addiction was signed on December 20. In it, as in the bilateral report, emphasis was placed on combating the illegal consumption of drugs, prohibiting apologies for it in any type of media, be it movies, magazines, TV, newspapers, or others. Emphasis was also placed on not impinging on the sovereignty of other states when pursuing international crime.

The need to prepare the United Nations to aid experts in eradicating drug addiction was discussed, making it a multilateral, rather than a bilateral effort. This had been a cause for friction between the US and Mexico, to mention only our case.

After the conclusion of the Vienna meetings in 1989, a panel of experts on drug addiction in our hemisphere was organized by the Institute of the Americas and the

Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies of the University of California, San Diego.

In their reports, they too emphasized the monumental task of combating drug demand: if there is no demand, there will be no supply. If we combat only production and trafficking on our continent, our hemisphere's supply will be replaced from another part of the world to satisfy our hemisphere's demand.

Young people must be educated, and rehabilitation programs for the sick encouraged. Education and information about the individual and collective damage involved is essential for combating the habit.

On occasion, friction has been created by mere ignorance of cultural differences between the US and Mexico. The best way to avoid this is through an increasingly in-depth knowledge of the northern part of the hemisphere, where two different cultures live face-to-face: the Ibero-American, and the Anglo-Saxon and French of the North.

The economic asymmetry between Mexico and her northern neighbors is very great. With time and effort, we can make that asymmetry disappear.

Insofar as Mexico's historical past is concerned, incomparable indigenous cultures developed long before Columbus' journey. They did so too during the 300 years of the Vice-Regency, and my country's strong cultural expressions of the present have also earned worldwide recognition.

Culture is the basis of sovereignty. Under the North American Free Trade Agreement, as each of our three countries penetrates deeper into its own culture, it will strengthen its own national profile. This is happening in Europe, to the benefit of plurality, part of the rich variety of world culture. Let us guarantee that reason and dialogue light our path ✽