

The Quebec Summit

The FTAA and Academic Research

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Shaun Best/Reuters

The three North American heads of state at the Quebec meeting.

Academic research is vital for understanding the new situation in the three countries of North America and the entire hemisphere and for taking advantages of current opportunities —non-existent one or five years ago— for improving our peoples' quality of life by dealing with the problems of the environment, water, energy and organized crime that affect each country differently, but that cannot be solved in isolation.

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I will focus on three questions: the new situation in the hemisphere, the results of the Quebec Summit and some reflections on the protests that took place at the time of the summit.

I have observed new and surprising events in my country that I never thought to see when I came to Mexico 18 months ago. The first is demographic: this year's census confirms a trend that we all suspected even though we lacked the empirical data to prove it. The figures indicate that Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States: almost 12 percent of

U.S. inhabitants are Latino. This sector of the population has grown almost 50 percent since the 1990 census (increasing from 22 million to 33 million) and is expected to reach 43 million by the year 2010, making the United States the second largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world, after Mexico.

The second change is linked to the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on our three countries. Seven years after coming into effect, the United States' two main trade partners are the two other co-signers of this treaty. Trade among

the three countries has more than doubled (going from U.S.\$289 billion in 1993 to U.S.\$659 billion in 2000) and almost tripled in the case of bilateral trade between the U.S. and Mexico (rising from U.S.\$89 billion in 1993 to U.S.\$263 billion in 2000). The number of jobs also grew.

These figures are very linked to a new political attitude. I never imagined that congressmen like Phil Gramm

stand the process, which deserves serious study and analysis, and take advantage of all the benefits it has to offer.

What happened at the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec is a new example of this convergence. Nevertheless, summits or negotiations—such as the one to create a new free trade area—are not, in my judgement, what drives convergence in the hemisphere, but rather an indicator of what

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—much less Jesse Helms— would visit Mexico bringing with them the message that we should work together with its government in migratory matters and in our efforts against organized crime, water and energy integration. This attitude of my country reflects an enormous change with regard to previous years, when Proposition 187 was passed in California and anti-immigrant measures passed in the 1996 migratory legislation.

All of this—demographics, politics, trade— helps explain why President Vicente Fox has begun to use the term “convergence” when he talks about our societies and their future relations. Our actions, ideas, values and economies are merging, integrating rapidly; there is a process of convergence in the hemisphere, whether we like it or not, and it has a life of its own that we do not want to turn around. In fact, we could not do it in today’s world interconnected by new communications technology. It is preferable to under-

stand the process in and of itself.

The two summit results most commented on by the media were the approval of a democracy clause and the renewed commitment to developing a hemisphere-wide free trade agreement by the year 2005. In fact, there are two distinct mechanisms: one is the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and the other, the summits.

The April meeting dealt with many other topics in addition to free trade. For example, the hemisphere’s leaders approved an almost 40-page work plan that includes 18 concrete actions that their governments want to carry out in areas as diverse as strengthening democracy, protecting migrants’ rights, improving access to health and educational services and integrating disaster prevention measures.

Another example of the U.S.’s new political attitude that was clear in Quebec is linked to President George W. Bush’s statements and participation in

the meeting. It was obvious to everyone that the president has a particular interest in the hemisphere and in using his own weight to further the integration process. Proof of this is that he announced six U.S. initiatives that very practically expressed the leaders’ concerns:

- **Third Border Initiative:** an effort to deepen cooperation between the United States and Caribbean nations, particularly with regard to HIV/AIDS, natural disaster response and law enforcement.
- **Andean Regional Initiative:** its aim is to foster stability and democracy in this region. In the budget President Bush has requested for fiscal year 2002, he apportions U.S.\$882 million to finance international projects, create democratic institutions, contribute to development and support anti-drug programs.
- **The creation of three Hemispheric Centers for Teacher Excellence** in the hemisphere to train teachers, increase literacy and support basic education.
- **A new American Fellows Program** aims to foster mutual understanding and excellence in governing in the hemisphere through exchange programs for outstanding medium- and high-level government officials.
- **The creation of an Inter-American E-Business Fellowship Program** aims to offer young professionals in the hemisphere the opportunity to learn computer technology.
- **Increased funding for the Tropical Forest Conservation Act**, will allow the nations of the hemisphere to swap reduction or restructuring of their debt for tropical forest conservation measures.



Protesters in Quebec.

Lastly, President Bush underlined the importance of free trade and promised that he would ensure the approval of the fast track procedure —now called “trade promotion authority”—before the end of the year. This implies that the U.S. Congress would give the executive the authority to negotiate trade treaties, while the Congress itself would have the power to approve or reject the treaty as a whole, but not change it. This authority does not mean negotiations cannot go forward, but rather is another sign of the president’s commitment.

I would like to make three observations about the demonstrations in Quebec during the Summit of the Americas.

First of all, I think the rights of assembly and of protest are an indispensable part of democracy, as long as these rights are exercised peacefully. Acting violently to capture the attention of television is not the only way to be heard. In fact, the world did not

understand these groups’ demands because they were obscured by the violence used.

Secondly, all of those present agreed on pointing to the importance of each leader being democratically elected and that his/her mandate be the product of a vote; that is, that each leader represent his/her people’s choice. Despite the differences in the size of their economies, all the leaders signed the agreements because they thought that the process included the needs of all the peoples. In that sense, it is important to note the broad range of decisions made in Quebec in the framework of this plan of action. I think that the leaders speak to the demands of civil society in issues such as migration, the eradication of poverty, the environment and many others.

Thirdly, the critiques of globalization by some of the so-called “globalphobes” are paradoxical. If it were not for the very nature of globalization (interconnection, technology and rapid

communications), no one would know about these groups’ criticisms. They are taking advantage of and benefiting from the system they criticize to disseminate their messages. In fact, the world knows much more about the problems of the environment, armaments, mines, human rights, etc., because of globalization. From my point of view, civil society has used its network to keep up to date about the summits, participate in the discussions and contribute positively to the results.

Lastly, in this context, research plays a very important role. Supporting the process, understanding what happens at the summits, ensuring that governments do what they commit themselves to doing are the challenges facing university researchers. This summit is an enormous forum for discussion of issues that must be studied, analyzed and supported in economic, political, cultural, sociodemographic and educational research projects. **MM**