

# OUR VOICE

In these times, when the superpower is indifferent, it is not a bad thing that someone from the northern part of the hemisphere pays attention to the southern part of the Americas. This should perhaps, however, be done with all due caution and reservation because the United States' emphasis on its hemispheric agenda's security issues since 2001—a return to the warrior mentality—has gravely distracted from topics fundamental to the area. Mexico has also fallen into the trap of this “distraction,” not without the influence of vested interests. Economic progress and democracy have been sacrificed, and today they must be dealt with in a new way if we want to make sure that the twenty-first century does not bring our nations new cycles of crises.

Recently there has been a heated debate about the routes to be followed to deal with issues pending in the hemisphere. The road has not been easy and the climate of the debate has had its ups and downs, caused largely by the United States' confusing policies in the region. For better or worse, we find ourselves in a region that has been part of the U.S. sphere of influence. From that perspective, our region—mainly Mexico and Central America—has been treated like the “American Mediterranean.” This analogy, conceived by Alfred Mahan, the first U.S. geo-politician, established a strong parallel between the strategic importance of the Mediterranean Sea for the great nineteenth-century European powers and that of the Caribbean Sea and Central America for the United States in the early twentieth century. Certainly, a country's geographical position favors the concentration of its power and gives it a greater possible strategic advantage *vis-à-vis* its rivals. This is the basis for Washington's persistent quest for hegemony, its reiterated blindness and its permanent tendency to intervene in other countries' affairs even if it is not justified, which has caused a lasting paralysis in the formulation of U.S. policy toward its southern neighbors, let alone those placed in other distant regions of the world.

The U.S. vision of its “near abroad” has had a negative impact on its historic interaction with the countries in the region. This is not only because it has not wanted to understand the Latin American situation, but because the U.S. has an ethnocentric vision that imposes and *constructs* reality through the prism from which this nation projects itself. The indisputable fact that the United States is the dominant power does not excuse it from facing the unexpected in the region or from helping to search for real solutions to the many problems we share. Nevertheless, the weight of the new circumstances in Latin America has not led Washington to adjust its policies to the new winds blowing in the hemisphere. It still behaves like a neo-colonial nation, insensitive to the region's problems in that they do not involve *its* security problems, and imposes Cold War policies, with their negative impact on the micro-climates of regional political struggles. It is not clear whether the United States is prepared to understand how much the hemisphere's political and economic circumstances are changing beyond imposing—and making sure Latin America follows—these policies stemming with mathematical certainty from its geographic position and power.

In this complex scenario, against the current of today's objective conditions of its geo-political location, Mexico seems to be undertaking a journey to the south. Some political actors and analysts talk of the need for Mexico to recover what it apparently has lost in its relations with Latin America. Felipe Calderón's recent trip to Central and South America shows Mexico's primordial political desire to recover its closeness to the region. Are we being realistic by undertaking closer relations? Is this attempt not more political than economic? What implications will this change in direction have in the preservation of Mexico's priority interests?

We think it is fundamental to debate exactly what and whom we are going to get close to with our new strategy in the hemisphere. For Mexico, Honduras is not the same as Brazil, Chile or Guatemala; Paraguay has no parallel with Mexico's relations with Argentina, Colombia or Nicaragua. Our common topics with each of the Latin American countries are not only specific to each, but also have different importance and problems. What should be done? With what countries and sub-region should we strengthen our foreign relations?

To accompany these questions, we should analyze the figures on trade with our neighbors. According to the Ministry of the Economy, so far this year Mexico has sold U.S.\$125 billion in North America, of which 90 percent corresponds to exports to the United States and 10 percent to Canada. By contrast, we have exported to Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil U.S.\$660 million, U.S.\$631 million and U.S.\$423 million, respectively, and a total of U.S.\$3.3 billion to the Latin American Integration Association (Aladi) region. Mexico exports only U.S.\$1.5 billion to Central America where our main buyers are Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, with U.S.\$442 million, U.S.\$320 million and U.S.\$270 million respectively. These are brutal figures that testify to the enormous asymmetry of Mexico's relationship with North and South.

An objective analysis of these figures demands a serious debate of aspects of our integration that pose several problems and challenges. In the first place, we experience a disparity in the hemisphere corresponding to the last century's center-periphery relationship. Mexico has lived with this disadvantageous reality, reflected in

the figures: 87 percent, 2 percent and 1 percent of all our foreign trade is concentrated in North, South and Central America, respectively. Certainly, it is strategically necessary to seek counterweights in our foreign relations in striving toward the solution of the many problems that depend on them.

If our proximity to the United States is determined by the geo-political conditions mentioned, our distance from the southern part of the Americas is something that can be assuaged. Today, political conditions may be ripe for contributing to expanding relations with important countries like Chile, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Cuba. And only based on political accords and agreements among the Latin American countries will it be possible to firm up the bases for democratic systems and thus contribute to viable integration. Latin America is facing a political reality that seems to be universal: a fading state and an expanding society that sometimes overwhelms it. Contributing to the strengthening of the rule of law and universal justice as a guarantee of the accord and multilateral cooperation in the Americas is the way forward. If our foreign policy is useful for something, it is to contribute to solving this persistent problem. Doing things the other way around will no longer work; we would continue to suffer from our ancestral weaknesses and, given that, Washington would not take our voices into account. This is the dimension of the challenge to the adventure of the Americas that Mexico will undertake.

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In addition to the undoubtedly weighty decisions about the country's trade and regional integration alliances, the new administration will have to determine criteria and strategies for participating in different multilateral bodies, particularly the United Nations and the Organization of American States. In this issue, we look at different sides of Mexico's multilateral dealings in the recent past. Two outstanding Mexican diplomats, Ambassadors Roberta Lajous and Jorge Eduardo Navarrete, contribute with critical reflections and proposals about our country's multilateral experience. Other contributors to our international sections are UN expert Luis Jiménez McInnis, who also deals with multilateral bodies; writer John Burstein, focusing on bilateral migration between Mexico and the United States; researcher María Cristina Rosas, dealing with national security strategies of the U.S. and Mexico five years after 9/11; and international analyst Carlos Heredia, analyzing the social aspects of North American integration.

Both our "Politics" and "Society" sections are dedicated to topics that are particularly timely when the presidential administration is about to change. In the first case, two well-known experts on electoral matters, Javier Aparicio and Ciro Murayama, reflect about the results of the controversial July 2 elections. They agree that while our current electoral institutions generally seemed to work, a new electoral reform cannot be put off. In the "Society" section, three insightful analysts deal with the changes our country needs. Roberto Gutiérrez looks at the recently passed telecommunications bill, the "Televisa Law," examining whether it is really a step back for equality and free competition in television and radio broadcasting. Manuel Gil Antón explores different facets of the profound crisis our country's public education is experiencing, evidenced by our dropping places in international educational ratings. And Kristine Byron contributes an excellent article about gender perceptions in today's collective imaginary based on the prototype of the *soldadera* of the Mexican Revolution.

We pay homage in this issue to one of our most important, most widely recognized twentieth-century artists, Raúl Anguiano, who recently passed away, and whose proposals contributed to renovating the Mexican school of painting. We dedicate the rest of our cultural sections to the state of San Luis Potosí, a region whose vast historical, cultural and artistic wealth deserves widespread recognition. Examples are *Xantolo*, the traditional local celebration of the Day of the Dead, or All Soul's Day, and the renowned Lila López International Contemporary Dance Festival. These articles are followed by a description of the recently excavated archaeological site of Tamtoc, which is radically changing the perception we previously had about the cultures of the Huastec region, and a look at the history of the state capital, San Luis Potosí, famous for its colonial architecture and mining history. Finally, we include a glimpse of the routes and sacred ancestral sites of the Huichol people, the most significant of which is the ecological reserve of Huiricuta. We finish up with a visit to the Federico Silva Contemporary Sculpture Museum, unique in Latin America, and a selection of short poetry by authors from San Luis Potosí in our "Literature" section.

This issue's "In Memoriam" pays tribute to Jaime Litvak, a beloved university teacher, researcher, archaeologist and disseminator of science and art in Mexico. His life and works are recognized by those of us who work in the National University and the scientific community as a whole.

*José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*