

Bosco Martí Ascencio, *Mesoamerica Project: Strengthening Integration and Regional Development*

“The Participating countries know that integration is translated into development...” These were the words of President Felipe Calderón at the Tenth Cumbre del Mecanismo de Diálogo y Concertación de Tuxtla, which took place last June, and in which the heads of state of Central America, Colombia and Mexico agreed to give a new impulse to the mechanism and work towards an Integration and Development project in Mesoamerica (Project Mesoamerica). The essay is divided into four sections: In the first section a balance is made of the results of the PPP; in the second section the reasons for retaking the PPP are examined and its transformation into Project Mesoamerica; the third one includes the work areas and the projects that integrate this regional mechanism, and in the fourth one, the conclusions and challenges of the project are presented. In the author’s opinion, among the challenges that Project Mesoamerica faces are: increasing international cooperation; using private and public associations to promote investment in these countries; coordinating efforts with the finance ministries and multilateral financial organisms, and positioning the mechanism in public opinion broadcasting with clarity, advances, and results. As it is pointed out in the conclusions, Project Mesoamerica is a long-term political compromise that is trying to give way to a more even development in the region. As the principal objective, the project will formulate and promote cooperating actions, development and integration, which will benefit the inhabitants of this region which is made up of nine countries.

Arturo C. Sotomayor Velázquez, *Civilians and the Military in Latin America: Progress and Setbacks in the Exercising of Civilian Control*

In his essay on the state of civil-military relations in Latin America, Sotomayor Velázquez points out that while these are no longer chaotic, they are not fully stable either. The armed forces are no longer in a conspiratorial mode, but neither are they complacent with the state of democracy. Progress in achieving full civilian control over the military has been seen in only a handful of chosen countries, with some states implementing more aggressive reforms to their military institutions than others. While uniformed personnel in Latin America have accepted the arrival of democracy, they have done so conditionally, while retaining institutional autonomy, prerogatives and reserve domains. Although elected leaders have greater authority by nature of their positions in democratic regimes, in the author's view, Latin America still has weak institutions and exercises weak ministerial civilian control over the armed forces. Likewise, civilians share responsibility because they have shown apathy towards military issues and defense policy, leading military officers to disregard civilian opinions. Sotomayor Velázquez concludes that the new democracies of Latin America still have a long way to go in crafting and designing appropriate missions and roles for the armed forces. Institutional accountability is lacking in most countries, especially in terms of defense budgets and military spending. Consequently, the region still faces important challenges in terms of civil-military relations, as defense reform is still required in order to ensure military compliance.

Rafael I. Montoya Bayardo, *Reflections on the Transition to Democracy and its Consolidation in Latin America*

The eighties was a period of political upheaval for South American nations, the transition from military to civilian governments elected by universal suffrage being perhaps the most difficult adjustment on the path to democracy. However, according to Montoya Bayardo, South American countries that have made a successful transition to democratic regimes now find themselves on the long and arduous path toward their consolidation. In the author's opinion, consolidating democracy is a much more complex process than the transition itself, as this implies strengthening and institutionalizing it over time, not merely via the holding of free elections and the restoration of civil liberties, but by creating institutions to safeguard its tenets and guarantee the equality of citizens in the eyes of the state and the law, regardless of opposition from pressure groups or any other entity. The author then goes on to analyze issues common to transitional processes such as these in Latin America, underlining the prerequisites and conditions that determine whether or not a given country has become a consolidated democracy, and looking at the role of the various actors in the process and the factors that affect it. It should be noted that Montoya Bayardo does not aim to take a systematic theoretical and/or methodological approach to this analysis; the intention is simply to share some of his "reflections on the transition to democracy and its consolidation in Latin America."

Rubén Laufer, *China and the Ruling Classes of Latin America: A New “Special Relationship”*

China has established itself as a primary point of reference vis-à-vis the international insertion of Latin American countries. In his essay, Laufer looks at how the aggressive expansion of China's economic and political influence in the region has given rise to defined factions among its ruling classes. Certain sectors, especially those associated with state or private economic groups in China, echo the opinion of Chinese leaders when they claim this is a complementary relationship. Advocates of this new “special relationship” are promoting the adaptation of regional economic structures to bring these into line with those of China's industrial economy, defining these ties with China as an opportunity that will enable Latin American nations to boost production, diversify international relations and reduce their debt. However, according to the author, both the structure of bilateral trade and Chinese investment in Latin America, whether state or private, tends to consolidate the classic international division of labor, reinforcing the region's traditional profile as an exporter of primary goods to the large powers. Laufer believes this relationship could potentially turn Latin America into an area of Chinese influence, rivaling the long-standing economic, political and strategic interests of the United States and Europe in the region.

Valeria Marina Valle, *Mercosur Leadership and the Ethanol vs. Oil Dilemma*

Today's global scenario poses new challenges to political and economic integration, an issue that is broached by Valeria Marina Valle in her paper on the Mercosur economic community. As a re-

gional integration process based on inter-governmental relations, Mercosur leaders have acquired important standing, often overshadowing the fledgling institutions they represent. According to the author, the structure of Mercosur has great bearing on political alliances, with Brazil stepping up as the community's natural leader. However, since Venezuela joined its ranks, Hugo Chávez has also emerged as a leader, resulting in debate on two opposing energy bills: Venezuelan oil versus Brazilian ethanol, a dilemma that the author goes on to analyze in depth. Regional integration or fragmentation, concludes Marina Valle, could hinge on the political alliances or antagonisms formed within Mercosur.

Rodrigo Salazar Elena, *The Foreign Policy of Hugo Chávez*

Since Hugo Chávez took office as president, Venezuela's foreign policy has been characterized by constant confrontation with the United States, the politicization of relations with other Latin American countries, selective cooperation and the subjugation of trade policy to ideological criteria. According to Salazar Elena, this style of conducting relations with other countries not only distances Venezuela from the majority of its Latin American neighbors, but strays from Venezuela's traditional practices. This policy, argues the author, stems from Chávez' desire to minimize multilateral intervention in light of the democratic shortfalls of his administration, coupled with a need to round up international support to offset internal opposition to his government. Salazar Elena concludes that there are three factors that have enabled Chávez to follow a foreign policy of this kind: a) his control over institutions that act as a counterbalance to presidential power; b) a climate of favorable opinion, and c) the recent hike in international oil prices.