

Interview with Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon

By Alejandro Alday

In interview with Alejandro Alday, Director-General of the Instituto Matías Romero, Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard spoke about the economic, tourism and cultural promotion of Mexico abroad and the role the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs will play in these undertakings.



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Alejandro Alday: What do you believe to be the pillars of a comprehensive agenda for the promotion of Mexico?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has made it clear that the best international policy is based on the efficacy and prestige of the national domestic policy. It therefore follows that our presence on the global arena shall be strengthened by the progress we make internally. In keeping with the mandate conferred upon him by the majority of Mexicans, the purpose of the Fourth Transformation is to lay the foundations of a new nation that aspires to transparency, honesty, austerity, the combatting of corruption and an improved standard of living.

This, in turn, has prompted us to rethink how we relate to other nations, beginning with the term “promotion”, which has come to be associated with a series of entities that represent a burden to the taxpayer, and that have not necessarily produced results in terms of growth and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Following the disbanding of these entities, the effort will be a joint one. The executive branch of the federal government will work with the legislature, the judiciary, state and municipal governments, the private initiative and non-government actors to take this new model beyond our borders.

Alejandro Alday: What role will the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE) play in implementing the new economic promotion strategy?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: We need to be aware of the new challenges we face in this area. By innovating, by exploiting the potential of our di-

plomacy and joining forces, we can increase the national content of exports, help micro, small and mid-size companies gain a larger share of the global market, diversify our exports and markets and attract investment.

Cooperation between the secretariats of the Economy (SE) and Foreign Affairs (SRE) is essential to our new strategy to promote Mexico's economic boons and draw potential investors.

Our public diplomacy strategy #DiplomaciaPublicaMX includes an innovative economic diplomacy mechanism, #DiplomaciaEconomicaMX, in which Secretary Graciela Márquez, the Under-Secretariat of International Economic Negotiations and the latter's Global Promotion Intelligence Unit participate enthusiastically alongside the Under-Secretariat of Multilateral Affairs and the Office for Global Economic Promotion at the SRE.

Under this new mechanism, we will be working closely with the private sector to implement strategic actions designed to foster a more inclusive, diverse and innovative economy.

Mexico boasts a world-class foreign service that, in the past, has proven itself more than capable of promoting our economic attributes, establishing ties with investors and helping Mexican companies gain a foothold on international markets.

Alejandro Alday: What do you believe to be the pillars of a comprehensive economic promotion agenda?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: We have taken on the task of familiarizing the world with Mexico's economic attributes and investors with our potential.

The #DiplomaciaEconomicaMX economic diplomacy initiative seeks to increase the national content of exports, accompany Mexican companies embarking on internationalization processes, diversify our exports and markets, and attract more quality foreign investment.

Other goals include making our resources stretch further in light of rapid technological progress and the digitalization of services, enforcing regulations governing appellations of origin, intellectual property and patents, and showing that we are fully committed to sustainable development.

Among the actions we have taken so far and that will need to be built on in the future are gathering information related to trade and economic development, facilitating a rapport between the public and private sec-

tors, and actively lobbying on the behalf of Mexican companies and entrepreneurs at multilateral forums.

As I have said before, all this will be possible with the cooperation of the government, states, municipalities and private initiative.

Alejandro Alday: How can tourism help reinforce Mexico's image abroad and contribute to the country's development?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: We can project a more positive image of Mexico in international eyes with a sustainable, inclusive, smart and diversified tourism policy that connects the country with the rest of the world and vice-versa.

What we need is an industry that takes into account environmental aspects and the needs of the population at large, and that is able to capitalize on the country's prime geopolitical location. Such an industry has the power to position us as a global benchmark and leading tourism force, not to mention contributing to the country's economic growth.

Mexico's cultural wealth, eventful history and colorful traditions have established us as one of the most-visited countries in the world.

It is this potential and our leading position in Latin America and the Caribbean that the Secretariat of Tourism, headed by Miguel Torruco, and its Department of Quality and Regulations plan to exploit in cooperation with the SRE as part of our #DiplomaciaTuristicaMX tourism diplomacy strategy designed to turn this sector into a model for development.

Tourism is a key component of our economic strategy, given the industry's connectivity and infrastructure, and the revenues it brings in. As such, our tourism policy needs to be married with policies to provide housing, create jobs, and improve services and the standard of living for people the length and breadth of the country.

It is also important that growth be ordered, that it engage civil society and business sectors in the creation of job opportunities, the building and upgrading of service infrastructure, the integration of regions with lower economic growth, the implementation of a security strategy and the creation of incentives to make our tourist destinations sustainable and competitive, and that it translate into a higher standard of living for all Mexicans.

Alejandro Alday: What kind of Mexico does the SRE want to promote abroad?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: We need to bear in mind that Mexico is a country with a consolidated democracy, immersed in irreversible modernization processes. We are a nation that is extremely attractive to foreign investors, who perceive us as a reliable destination for their capital and a land of opportunity by virtue of our geopolitical location. Mexico is an inclusive country in which all political, social and economic actors are taken into account and in which all voices are heard.

The SRE is well aware that it represents all three levels of government and the three branches of power. We create opportunities for dialogue for Mexican companies with export potential and assist non-government actors seeking to make a mark beyond our borders.

Mexico is in the process of implementing radical, far-reaching changes. Explaining the transcendence of these to the world and the challenges we face in terms of combatting corruption, introducing austerity measures and improving the population's quality of life is a task that befalls those responsible for representing our country overseas.

We need to promote Mexico as the country it is today: diverse, rich in natural and cultural resources, populated by honest, hospitable people, with a privileged geopolitical location and a progressive government whose actions are focused on fostering human development.

We need to ensure Mexico is perceived for what it is: a country that has historically been connected to the rest of the world; an emerging power fully inserted in North America; Ibero-American par excellence, with one foot in the Pacific and the other in the Atlantic; a country that naturally forms part of Central America and the Caribbean; that commands unquestionable leadership in Latin America; and one of the world's most prominent Spanish-speaking nations. Ours is a mixed heritage with indigenous, African, Spanish, Jewish and Islamic roots.

Suffice to pinpoint Mexico on the map to realize how well positioned we are geographically, connected by land and sea with the major geopolitical blocs, with which we are eager to preserve ties.

Likewise, in the areas of culture and tourism, Mexico has potential very few other nations can lay claim to. We are a country with millenary traditions and enormous cultural diversity; a creative, dynamic country with

new generations of artists whose powers of imagination have yet to be unleashed. It is important we capitalize on these attributes.

We are a country that protects its interests and those of its citizens living abroad, and that contributes to multilateral dialogue at international forums.

We are a country that addresses its problems with intelligence and planning; a nation with a forward-looking, inclusive government that intends to honor the trust its citizens have placed in it.

Alejandro Alday: What part does culture have to play in promoting Mexico abroad?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: President López Obrador aims to turn culture into a vehicle for the development of communities and groups of creators that were marginalized until not so long ago. In this regard, diplomacy is a powerful tool for promoting Mexican culture, not just within our borders, but beyond them. The SRE is doing its part to ensure this goal becomes a reality.

As part of our public diplomacy strategy, we have come up with the cultural diplomacy initiative #DiplomaciaCulturalMX, which takes on even greater importance in light of Mexico's potential in this area. Participating in this initiative are the Secretariat of Culture, headed by Alejandra Frausto, and the Executive Office of Cultural Diplomacy at the SRE, which are both represented on the Cultural Diplomacy Council, a body specifically created by this government to promote Mexico's enormous cultural wealth and creative spirit internationally.

During this new phase, we face the challenge of creating a discourse that strikes an effective balance between the country's past, present and future; one that simultaneously explains our history, our capacity to reinvent ourselves and that invites us to embrace the future with enthusiasm and optimism.

Alejandro Alday: In light of the enormous responsibilities the SRE has been assigned in the areas of economic, tourism and cultural promotion, how can we best utilize Mexico's network of foreign representations?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: There can be no denying we need to exploit Mexico's extensive network of consulates and embassies, which are ideally positioned to identify key issues, come up with strategies from a local per-

spective and decide which language is best suited to conveying the desired message, taking a cross-cutting diplomatic approach.

It should be remembered that some of our 80 embassies, 67 consulates, seven permanent representations and three liaison offices have departments that deal specifically with economic affairs, cultural promotion and academic cooperation, in addition to information-gathering bodies whose task is to determine in which areas Mexico has the potential to strengthen its presence and shore up its economic, political and cultural ties.

Alejandro Alday: How do you think Mexican diplomacy needs to adapt in order to successfully execute these new tasks?

Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon: The initial and ongoing training of members of the Mexican Foreign Service should provide them with the tools they need to establish channels of communication with the new actors participating in international diplomacy.

This requires that they have the knowledge to promote, during the course of their duties, the national values, principles and interests inherent to a foreign policy based on inter-institutional cooperation and that has the Mexican people at its center.

Particularly challenging will be making the transition from a traditional brand of diplomacy to a results-based one whose strategies and courses of action have been mapped out in cooperation with these new actors, which include civil society, companies, think-tanks and academia.

The Mexican Foreign Service has displayed the talent and character to address these challenges. We can draw on its experience as, together, we learn to adapt to a changing domestic and world order.

It is here that the Instituto Matías Romero will play an invaluable role in the training of diplomatic corps specialized in public diplomacy, thereby contributing to the design of a flexible, multi-dimensional foreign policy.

Only with such a policy can Mexico successfully navigate our increasingly complex, constantly changing world. Only with such a forward-looking approach and a series of systematized tools and strategies can our country communicate effectively with others and respond appropriately to the challenges that present themselves, both now and in the future. In this task, I repeat, the Instituto Matías Romero will play a key role.