

EDITORIAL

The integration of democratic and libertarian-leaning South American nations demonstrates the changes taking place in the world system. In spite of obvious limitations, this process of integration involves ideas disseminated after the wars of Independence, therefore two centuries ago. What were former colonies are now moving in a direction significantly different from subordination to the Great Powers to which they have always been subjected. Specifically, they are motivated by the domination consolidated during the Cold War, when South America was seen as a safe territory for US designs.

One could discuss the consistency of ongoing efforts – as well as the ability to overcome inevitable obstacles – but it is impossible not to recognize the ever-increasing political will to establish fruitful relationships in the region. Cooperation and solidarity have gone well beyond breaking down trade barriers and include such sensitive aspects as scientific development and military defense.

Because an in-depth understanding of the integration process requires observations from many disciplines and a long historical perspective, we begin by presenting three articles that focus on the discourses related to the construction of nationalities and the strategic meaning of continental integration.

Eduardo Munhoz Svartman, in his study of the Uruguayan case, invites us to think about the dilemmas of a small country situated in a conflictual area. The term “homeland” was central in the political struggles of Uruguay in the first decades of the 19th century; it was used to mobilize collective feelings of loyalty as the present-day nation states were being configured. The word “nation” came into use as institutions were strengthened despite serious domestic and external con-

flicts. The Uruguayan nation was consolidated after the War of Paraguay, known by its neighbors as the “War of the Triple Alliance”, and it was only in the late 19th century that “national borders” were institutionalized in the southern part of the Continent.

In the Amazon region, territorial boundaries took a longer time, despite efforts to the contrary, such as the expedition sponsored by the governments of Peru and Brazil in 1904–1905 led by Euclides da Cunha. As Ana Maria Roland considers, the opportunity to discover the headwaters of the Rio Purus allowed Euclides, the writer, to develop a strategic vision regarding the emergence of nationalities in the environment he described as an “aquatic wilderness”. In many ways, Euclides’ perceptions would later be shared by Brazilian officials. Even then he was indicating the need to produce information about the forest, denouncing the inhumane working conditions of those producing to meet international demand and pointing to the importance of river and land communications between the Atlantic and Pacific.

As we in the “Nationalities Watch” have contemplated, the agenda of South American cooperation presupposes and propels the consolidation of nation-statehood. The affirmation of nationalities involves both overcoming explosive social discrimination and intensifying external trade. Integration proceeds in parallel with implanting new attitudes in subjugated native peoples and implementing social programs. Bolivia and Ecuador, whose rulers call attention to their ethnic origins and reformist orientation, exemplify the tensions intrinsic to integration dynamics. Colombia, now the main supporter of the United States in South America, seems to be moving in the opposite direction in spite of the armed insurgency that for decades has destabilized its institutions. The article by Igor Rodriguez Calderon on the crucial role of the

Indian in Colombian identity construction is rich in demonstrating how liberal elites between 1930 and 1946 deployed policies labeled as “indigenist” that contradicted the interests of native groups and communities. Allegedly progressive discourse can in fact hide separatist attitudes.

Many of those who drive the integration initiatives have been in the forefront of the opposition to authoritarian regimes that have plagued the Continent. Anti-imperialism that accompanied the fight against military dictatorships fostered South American solidarity. This is evident from Viviana Ramirez’ narrative; Chilean, she has sought to situate her personal experience of exile in the historical process and offers a personal reading of the vicissitudes of its struggle for democracy. Her life experience gives rise to reflections on the dilemmas of dual nationality and the formation of national feeling among exiled persons.

In Argentina, the Peronist party, banned by the generals, returned triumphantly to the scene and then, under the Menem presidency, openly supported the structural reforms advised by the international financial institutions. As part of the ongoing research on multilateralism within the ambit of “Nationalities Watch”, Monica Martins and Sergio Pistolesi examine the external and internal factors that drove neoliberal policies under Peronism, whose political ideals included defense of a strong State, attachment to “national values” and stroking society’s poorest segments.

The possibility of accelerating economic and social development has encouraged the integrationist determination. Overcoming resistance fueled by the colonial mentality, the Union of South American Nations, UNASUR, made up of twelve national States, is faced with the need for new ideas. In his analysis on the significance of this organization, Brazil’s ambassador to Venezuela, Antonio Simões, highlights the challenges and promising perspectives in course.

Among resounding innovations of the current integration process are those pertaining to national defense. The cooperation of South American armed forces happens at the same time as profound changes in military organization, especially in regard to the composition of its corps. For its symbolic content, no innovation is more important than the introduction of women in the troops. In the article "Being a soldier, being a woman", Maria Cecilia Adão and Suzeley Kalil Mathias assess what is happening in this area in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Concluding this thematic issue, we publish the works of researchers who are investigating the weaknesses of democracy and economic activity in Latin American nations in comparative perspective. Vladimira Dvorakova, from the University of Economics in Prague, discusses the manifestations of civil society in Latin America and Eastern Europe since the seventies. Analyzing the consequences of financial globalization, Pierre Salama studies the behavior of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico in the face of the recent international crisis and compares these countries with Asian economies.

The Editors