

DEMOCRACY

The democratic challenge and economic integration

Summary of the conferences and discussions on Friday, September 19, 1997

Chair:	Mr. Isidro Muñoz Rivera President of the Congress of the State of Mexico
Vice-Chair:	Mr. Yvon Vallières Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of the National Assembly of Québec
Speakers:	Mr. Manuel Antonio Garretón Mérimo Full Professor of the Department of Sociology of the University of Chile
	Mr. Robert A. Pastor Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Program, The Carter Center
	Madam Elisabeth Spehar Executive Coordinator of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy of the Organization of American States (OAS)
Secretary:	Mr. Charles Thumerelle National Assembly of Québec

Mr. Manuel Antonio Garretón Mérimo is a Full Professor of the Department of Sociology, University of Chile. He holds a PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. An Assistant Professor at Georgetown University since 1990, he has also been a visiting professor at Oxford University and at Notre Dame University. The author of some fifteen books and one hundred articles, translated into several languages, he has conducted research and taught in political sociology, and particularly on the themes of the State and society, democratization and transition, and authoritarian regimes.

In the framework of the globalization phenomenon that we are witnessing on a worldwide level, the free trade agreements and treaties in their various forms have given rise on the one hand to integration processes, at the regional as well as international level, and on the other hand to a disarticulation of traditional modes of operation, at the national level. In this regard, the “polis”, as a centre grouping together a set of democratic institutions where citizens have rights and where

politics plays a dominant role, has been weakened.

This observation suggests new thinking with regard to economic spaces emerging in a world where globalization is the watchword. In order for considerations of an economic nature not to exercise hegemony over politics, and for a convergence of the two spheres to be possible, it becomes essential to create a supranational structure based on the principles that govern democracy. The latter must necessarily take into account the main components of the “polis”, namely the economic, political, cultural and social spheres, toward which society generally converges.

However, this process must necessarily fit within a period of transition and consolidation, which leads to several types of problems: (1) that of the “relevance” of the political regime, i.e. its limits in resolving a certain number of societal problems that are outside of State control (e.g. problems relating to religion, private life, etc.) and which may be recuperated by opposing forces (e.g. corruption, drug trafficking, certain transnational forces such as the Churches, foreign governments, etc.); (2) the “deepening” of democracies, which implies an extension of democratic principles to all levels of society (national, regional or local); (3) the quality of democracy, which refers to the competence and aptitudes of the political class (that is, in particular, its capacity for self-renewal, or to implement affirmative action policies favouring women and minorities), and to the participation of citizens.

These difficulties demand a threefold reinforcement: (1) consolidation of the State on the basis of a control of spending related to the financing of political activities; (2) a review of its traditional functions, whether involving a reduction of military functions, an increase in functions of integration or the strengthening of representation functions (the political parties system); (3) the reinforcement of citizenship, at a time when we are witnessing a broadening of its field of application, which presupposes the redefinition of this concept at the supranational level.

Ultimately, the problem that is facing us, namely the setting up of democratic systems in an increasingly globalized world subject to even greater integration, imposes a reconstruction of the concept of the “polis”, particularly at the regional, national and supranational level. It is clear that such a process, which requires the creation of executive, legislative and citizens’ participation components on an institutional basis, will require the mobilization of considerable resources that it

will be possible to free up only through a reduction of States' expenditures, particularly in the area of military budgets.

Mr. Robert A. Pastor is Director of the Latin American and Caribbean program at the Carter Center. He is also a professor at Emory University and the author of ten books and over 200 articles on topics that include democracy, international trade, Latin America and the Caribbean. He often gives conferences, and acts as a consultant for the American government and for several international organizations. As Executive Secretary of the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, he has been closely linked with control and mediation in the area of electoral operations in some ten countries in the Americas.

During the post-Cold War period, it has been possible to witness a veritable rallying of States toward democracy in both Hemispheres. However, this phenomenon is currently facing challenges of a different nature, particularly in the Americas.

Firstly, it is clear that democracy is not possible without free elections in which all the political parties have the opportunity to express themselves. To this should be added the existence of a second generation of challenges shared by all countries in the Americas, such as the problem of the financing of election campaigns, as in the United States, army interference in the civil sphere, and regular outbreaks of urban violence. In order to solve these problems, it is essential to consolidate the parliamentary institutions which have suffered erosion in the course of time, in accordance with the rule of law.

Furthermore, the movement toward globalization, while certainly of benefit as it makes possible the suppression of isolation, itself raises problems, because it has unequal effects between rich and poor nations. Parliamentarians therefore have a crucial role to fulfill in order to compensate the populations or groups that are the most harmed by this process, while multilateral negotiations are taking place between our different countries. Indeed, it is essential to continue the integration movement on a hemispheric scale by reinforcing the international obligations of each country and by developing protection mechanisms capable of fulfilling certain fundamental principles, namely

providing assistance to those that are left out, protection of Human Rights and the right to work, as well as access to education.

It would be possible to mobilize the resources necessary for the consolidation of this process of integration on a democratic basis, by bringing to an end the arms race. In this regard, it would be desirable for this Conference to be followed up within 2 to 3 years in order to evaluate the overall progress accomplished.

Madam Elizabeth Spehar is Executive Coordinator of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy of the Organization of American States (OAS). Director of the Program of the Americas of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal from 1990 to 1995, she also acted as an international development consultant for agencies such as the Centre for Research in International Development and the Canadian International Development Agency. She has also served as a program officer for the United Nations Development Program.

During the past decade, there has been a slow but steady convergence of ideas that integrate democracy as a common value, an absolute and collective priority. In this regard, the Organization of American States, through several amendments to its Charter, has raised the promotion and defence of democracy in the Hemisphere to the level of an absolute priority. This consensus has spread to the economic sphere, on the principles of the liberalization of trade, and of stability and prosperity at the regional and sub-regional levels. It is clear that without democracy, there can be no viable economic integration. In Latin America, in particular, the processes of democratization and pacification have provided the basic conditions for greater economic cooperation in the region. The existence of a legal framework capable of guaranteeing transparency and the rule of law therefore constitutes a fundamental factor in integration.

On the other hand, growth and economic prosperity also exercise a determining influence on political stability. From this viewpoint, integration constitutes an essential benchmark that allows economies of scale by creating, in particular, new jobs and new sectors of activity. Moreover, while

this interdependence between countries stimulates everyone's interest with regard to the overall stability, any interruption of the democratic order represents an unacceptable obstacle to the continuity of the integration process.

Nevertheless, these changes have involved a redefinition of the traditional role of the State. Indeed, economic integration is often presented as a threat to the democratic order, liable to lead to internal ruptures, by exacerbating the already existing inequalities, by compromising the rights of individuals and their participation in the development of the society to which they belong. It is therefore difficult to dissociate economic integration from the other factors that underlie it, whether one considers the social aspects, the respect of fundamental rights of individuals, or the ecological dimension. The creation of a "Free-Trade Area of the Americas", which has seen significant progress since the Miami Summit, should take into account the following aspects: (1) the participation of citizens in the negotiation process; (2) the dissemination of information to the populations regarding the choices made and the progress achieved; (3) the opening by governments of new spaces in order to allow the expression of such participation; (4) the setting up of mechanisms making it possible to provide the different sectors interested in this process with the expertise and information necessary for the improvement of technical analyses; (5) the strengthening of the role of mediators between the government and the population played by political parties; (6) the strengthening of the control function of Parliaments; (7) the undertaking of new studies in order to analyse the many dimensions raised by the hemispheric integration process.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Firstly, the participants took time to recognize the quality of the presentations and the importance of the different dimensions raised by the speakers. Afterward, the true objectives of the hemispheric integration process were questioned, particularly with regard to the common standards that should govern such a movement. Actually, is the idea to improve the quality of life of individuals in the framework of a phenomenon of equitable globalization, or is it rather to have the poor countries adopt the standards of the rich countries? It was argued that globalization must constitute, above all, an equitable process for all, whereas in the Americas there exist considerable inequalities between

North and South. Moreover, it was suggested that young people, who remain the *future* and the *life blood* of our societies, be taken into account, as well as other segments of the population which remain the most vulnerable to the integration project under way (e.g. the elderly, women or native peoples, to name only a few).

Furthermore, how can we reconcile the principle of respect for democratic values and the rule of law, as a common standard in the framework of an economic integration process, and the respect of the sovereignty of States? It was recalled that by its very nature, integration broadens the concept of Human Rights and participates in the democratization of regimes because it brings about a rallying of States around common values that are today universally accepted and considered by all as forming a priority objective (even though the heightened economic competition can lead to injustices). In addition, even though the charters of rights have entrenched the sovereign right of all States, it is important to keep in mind that the international Conventions (e.g. the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the OAS, the American Convention on Human Rights, etc.) have raised Human Rights and democracy to the level of fundamental principles.

It was also pointed out that the political and economic objectives converge and that only spaces of democratic integration allow the free expression and the participation of citizens. It is therefore essential to encourage formulae capable of stimulating participatory democracy (e.g. referendums, plebiscites or the creation of national commissions), in facing a process that demands everyone's contribution. It was suggested that exchanges between countries be increased in the area of sharing knowhow regarding mechanisms of participation and the provisions for a greater decentralization of societies. Finally, emphasis was placed on the importance of downsizing military budgets and the ending of the arms race in a context of the Cold War being over, so as to devote additional resources to the development of civil societies throughout the Hemisphere.