

Modernities and democracies in the globalized world A view from Latin America* .

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In the globalized world of today, Latin America seems not to count very much. However Latin American societies have been living through profound transformations in recent decades. This paper aims to describe the main “problematique” of this region and to assess the questions and perspectives of its participation in the world that is in process of constitution.

Decomposition or transformation of society?

Four main changes has occurred in the last twenty years in Latin America, in different moments and degrees according to the country case. The first one is the dominance of political-institutional models of consensus and conflict that tend to replace the dictatorships, civil wars and revolutionary modalities of previous decades. The second is the exhaustion of the model of "inward development", and its replacement with formulas of adjustment and stabilization, based in the so called “Washington consensus” that seek new forms of insertion into the world economy, characterized by phenomena of globalization and transnationalization of the market forces. The third is the transformation of the social structure, with an increment in inequality, poverty and marginality and the precariousness of the educational and labor systems, even after new educational reforms.. This has produced a recomposition of the system of social actors and a questioning of the traditional forms of collective action. Finally, the crisis of the

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model of modernity associated to Western modernization and the North American mass culture predominant in our society or, at least, among the leading elites, and an raising of indigenous and hybrid formulas of modernity.

Hidden by these transformations, and beyond the deep socio-economic crisis of the beginning of the century of which Argentina is the best example, there is a more deep change that affects all the world and in a specific way the Latin American societies. In fact, we are facing a change of the basic referential societal type of the contemporary and Latin American society, produced, among other things, by the phenomena of globalization and expansion of the principles of identity and citizenship. This means a disarticulation of what was the predominant societal type, the national State industrial society, although with different degrees of development according to the concrete historical societies. This type was organized around labor and politics, especially the latter in Latin America, and processes of social change defined as modernization, industrialization and development, and its fundamental social actors were classes, parties and social movements referred to both.

It is not a question of a passage from one societal type to another, but of a combination in each concrete historical society, of the national State industrial society with a societal type we might call globalized post-industrial. This is structured around consumption and communications and its main actors are publics, networks, NGOs, de facto powers and the identitarian ones.

Indeed, in different degrees and forms Latin American societies never completely achieved a national State industrial society. They were less defined by that structure and more by their change and movement towards this referential society in a process called development and social integration. But always these societies were torn between their national State industrial society project and a fragmented, hybrid, blend of different civilizatorian worlds within each society

Today, without being an integrated national State industrial society, that is, a particular historical-cultural variant of this type of society, Latin American societies face the challenge to become also an historical-culturally specific and original combination of that type with the post-industrial globalized societal type. This transformation redefines

the roles of politics and States, the central actors of social change and the concept itself of development., as different theories and institutions have been proposing.

All these changes point towards a transformation of the matrix of constitution of society, or the socio-political model or matrix, in Latin America.

The socio-political model, that prevailed in the middle of the twenty century existed in a historical-structural context characterized by the contradicting confluence of nationalist, developmental, modernizing processes, at the same time as an industrialization oriented towards the internal market with a central role of the State, a leading presence with oligarchic and middle class components, and intense processes of popular mobilization in which politics constituted the main axis.

In this context, Latin American societies privileged a socio-political matrix that defined, according to the case, a relationship of fusion, imbrication, subordination either of the State, the system of representation or the social actors. Thus, in some countries the fusion between these elements was achieved through the figure of the populist leader, in others through the identification between State and political party or upon the articulation between social organization and political-party leadership. There was also the case where the party system fused all the social fractions or the corporate organizations hoarded the totality of collective action without leaving room for autonomous political life.

We have often called this a classical or politically centered matrix. It can be named also State-national-popular, having gone through diverse historical expressions, like populisms of different kinds and even certain forms of militarism or authoritarianism, surviving for long decades through very different types of political regime.

In this classical matrix, the State played a referential role for all collective actions, be it development, social mobility and mobilization, redistribution, the integration of popular sectors. But it was a State with a weak autonomy from society and upon which weighed all the pressures and demands, both internal and external. This interpenetration between State and society gave politics a central role. Aside from exceptional cases, it was more a mobilizing than representational politics, and the institutions of representation were, in

general, the weakest part of the matrix. The “statist” principle present in the whole of society, was not always accompanied by an State institutional autonomy and effective capacity for action.

Directed against this matrix and this type of State are the revolutionary movements of the sixties, criticizing its mesocratic aspect and its inability to satisfy popular interests, as well as the military regimes that began in the sixties in Latin America. In the eighties and nineties, the processes of political democratization and of structural adjustments and economic reforms, in turn, coincides with the acknowledgment of the void left by the dissarticulated old matrix. This was not replaced by another stable and coherent configuration of the relations between State and society. Different substitutes tend to install themselves in this void, making impossible the strengthening, autonomy and complementarity between the components of the matrix (State, regime and political actors, social actors or civil society), either eliminating one or two of them, or subordinating them, or sacralizing only one of them.

Synthesizing, what we call the classical socio-political matrix, characterized by the fusion of the elements that compose it and that went together with a certain type of State, development model and political culture, has suffered a profound dissarticulation.

Thus, the fundamental issue is whether or not, beyond the process of political democratization or the passage to an economic model based on the forces of the transnationalized market, we are witnessing the emergence of a new societal type, this is, a new socio-political matrix. This can't be accounted for by the technocratic-conservative efforts, the neo-liberal economic model or the personalistic mobilizations known to date. Most probably, the countries will follow different roads in this matter, going from a continuing decomposition, to new kinds of populism or to a more open model characterized by the re giving to the State a leading role in development but with an autonomous party system and reinforced civil society.

The changing role of politics.

At least two important socio-cultural transformations, that pervades societies all over the world will affect the role of politics which has been so crucial in the constitution of

its societies.

In first place, a certain dissociation is produced between economy, politics, culture and social organization, where each one of these dimensions acquires its own dynamic in relation, in part, to diverse forms of globalization. This apparently leaves the society without a “center”, without a cement as some of these spheres that coordinated or articulated with the others were before. What happens then, is that it weakens the society as a political community, as a polis and various partial “centers” appear in place of the national State.

In second place, on a psycho-social and cultural level, we live in a time in which we produce and will continue to produce an expansion of subjectivity as a principle and reference of social life, with the search for meaning and happiness acquiring predominant roles. This implies, on one hand, the de-institutionalization of social life, which can be seen, among other dimensions, in the deep transformations and diversification of the family institution. This is accompanied by the de-normativization of individual behaviors and the personalization and intersubjectivation of ethics. On the other hand, the ideological movements that united individual and group projects with the collective destiny of society and that provided utopias and complete architecture for it are over. It is not that the ideologies or the utopias disappear, just that they lose their all-encompassing nature and move on to being tentative and partial principles to manage change and to seek more human forms of personal and collective life.

All of this necessarily influences the redefinition of politics.

Politics, in another time in Latin America, was basically two things: on one hand, an important path to accede to determined goods and levels of life through the State and on the other, it was the place where subjectivity and integration united and combined into a collective project, where the person identified with the society, an idea of nation. Politics provided benefits (housing, education, health, sometimes employment) through the State and gave meaning to the lives of people, individually and collectively. Political culture then, was pragmatic or instrumental and ideological and transcendental: one stuck to politics for convenience but also for the search for meaning. In Latin American and Chilean politics there was an ethic and religious component, to the extent

that one was a part of something that transcended him/her. In contrast, other societies give a religious meaning to the economy or other areas of social life.

Political culture was also much more a culture of democratization than democracy, of mobilization that of representation. In other words, democracy was not valued primarily in its political aspects as a form of government or as a set of rules and institutions but as the integration of a society as a means of being subject to it.

This double dimension, instrumental and ideological or transcendental, explains the coexistence of negotiation rationality with the friend-enemy and revolutionary logic. In the first place, in certain Latin American societies, institutions were practically nonexistent and one acted above or below or beside them. In other societies, institutions were recognized, but ambivalent interpretations were established from each sector on their meaning and people sought their adaptation to particular interests. The character of this institutionality was at the same time integrating and differentiating and excluding (for example the institutions that defined the legitimacy of children or the social security both public and segmented). What was at stake was taking advantage of them to serve specific interests.

Military dictatorships of a foundational type, the processes of political democratization that ended them, together with the economic and sociocultural transformation that we will refer to meant the end of this kind of politics. The processes of political democratization were carried out in the sense of valuing institutionality and implied the movement from a purely mobilizing and content-based form of politics to one that understood that the forms of representation and procedures are also content, are also substantive. Thus, today, regarding the institutions (elections, parties, State powers), they tend to produce acceptance, valuation and distrust at the same time. This ambivalence can be seen in the public opinion surveys, for example when it is asked if political parties “are indispensable for democracy” and if “the current political parties only serve their own interests instead of serving the people”: in both cases, the percentage of people that agree with these statements is very high.

We already stated that politics until the dictatorship was a place where people acceded to the benefits of the society, much more than through other spheres or activities. It was

also the place where the projects that united individual subjectivity and collective transcendence were constituted.

Currently, politics offers much less than these two elements. Among other things, because the structural transformation and the change of development model have meant that the State has lost the monopoly on offers of material or symbolic goods, health, housing, social security, and communication that today have been privatized. The State, and through it, politics, are no longer the only great suppliers and what they offer is less apparent and more abstract: social life in a political community, in the polis. Politics is no longer the only vehicle necessary to generate those goods and at the same time, subjectivity is expressed in many ways, not only ideas or ideological-political projects.

This multidimensional expression of the individual and collective subjectivity outside of politics is particularly visible among young people: in music, in interpersonal relations, in a certain ecological consciousness, in a density of youth culture that says in some way that “to be happy, I don’t need to be leftist, nor centrist, nor rightist”. In another time, to “be happy”, it was necessary to be a part of some political project: “make love and revolution”, “in the street we are many more than two”..., let’s remember the “Captain’s Verses” of Neruda.

Then the two basic functions of politics in Latin America and Chile have changed but have not disappeared. Politics loses its centrality and its extensive nature, just in the moment when we learn and consider that institutions are important. There is a movement to separate “politics” and what is “political” where “political” is still important, as a concern for the “good society”, for the general orientation of the society, but distant and disconnected from “politics”, seen as a faraway specific or professional activity. It is not that people are not interested in politics, it is just that they feel that it is not the best way to express themselves in the “political” dimension.

Politics begins to rotate around itself and therefore, becomes much more abstract in relation to people’s lives which have and maintain an ideological dimension but of a more concrete nature. What reason would I have to be concerned about politics if it is so distant from my experience of self-realization, understood not only as satisfaction of material needs, not only as daily consumption, but also as a social subject?

This is not well understood by a perplexed political class, accustomed to another historic situation and another task. According to some sectors of this class, politicians should be concerned with and resolve people's problems. Then politicians try to transform themselves in priests, psychologists, doctors, constructors, providers of goods and services, dedicated to resolving "problems of the people". The truth is that people want to resolve problems on their own and require spaces, organizations and resources. They demand from politics ideas and meaning, no longer all-encompassing, but yes concerning social life and political community because that is what the people on their own cannot do.

Success and deficit of political democratization

Historically, democratic practice and thought in Latin America were characterized by the contamination between political democracy and social democratization. The military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, and, in other places, the authoritarian components of regimes that could not be defined as properly military, are a landmark that provoked a mutation in the political life and the theoretical reflection on the matter.

Because in these circumstances, the elemental idea of ending the dictatorships arises - even if that does not solve other problems, nor change other evils of society- because these regimes appear as the negation of human life and are an evil in themselves. What matters is that people may live, to rescue the basic principle of life, and affirm the good life. That is called human rights. But, in affirming human rights, what is postulated is a regime in which those human rights are valid and where no one with power can eliminate them or violate them with impunity. Democracy appears as the historical example of that regime.

The processes of construction of democratic institutions that we call political democratization, have followed three main directions.

The first form that political democratization have assumed are the democratic foundations. It refers to societies or countries, that had not experienced democratic regimes and that install for the first time a democracy, like, for example South Africa. In

the last decades, this process of democratic foundation in Latin America has taken place above all in countries in Central America, in which a democratic regime is generated, or the political system is entirely re-founded, after processes of confrontation through civil wars, guerrillas or revolutions. The second type of political democratization, that at some moment tended to be identified as the only one, is what we will call transitions. This refers to the passage from a formally authoritarian or military regime to a basically democratic regime, although it may be incomplete or imperfect. That is the case of countries like Spain, from where the analytical criteria for Latin America were taken, and of South America, especially the Southern Cone in a broad sense. In the case of transitions, there was no internal military defeat, even though there is a sort of political defeat for the military nucleus in power. All of them are characterized by complex processes of negotiation and by the definition of an institutional arena for ending the dictatorships. The third road for political democratization has been reform, destined to the transformation, broadening or extension of democratic institutions from regimes that are not formally military or authoritarian, but operate instead with a dominance of autocratic or semi-authoritarian forms, or under the shape of restricted or exclusive democracies, as could be the Mexican case. With many differences among these cases, all of them are cases in which there is not a passage from a formally authoritarian regime or a military dictatorship, but are instead processes in which protagonic actors, obviously not the only ones, are the government or the party or parties in government.

The processes to replace military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes seem to have ended, or at least do not seem to be the central political processes any more. Said otherwise, the great crises of formal authoritarian regression seem to be controlled, with very few exceptions. But it does not mean that the political democratization processes have been completely successful. Their pending tasks will have to be fulfilled in the context of social and political processes that cannot be meaningfully defined as transitions.

In general terms, we are facing, with some exceptions, incomplete or weak democracies. Even if there exist a very fluid situation for some countries, it is possible to make a very preliminar balance. In some cases a post authoritarian regime seems not still to be consolidated (Paraguay). In other cases they are regimes that, while being basically democratic, maintain a certain trace of the prior regime, what we have called

authoritarian enclaves (Chile, México, Guatemala, for example). In other cases, the composition of the system of representation in the democratic regime is still under way (Venezuela). Also there is a group of countries that live with a certain decomposition of the ensemble of the political system or in which the de facto powers do not submit to the rules of the institutional game or the citizenry isn't able to constitute itself as such, which makes their democracies relatively irrelevant for the fulfillment of the tasks inherent to every regime (Colombia, Argentina). Finally there are some successful political democratization, at the top Uruguay, and other that are consolidated democracies but with serious problems of representation and quality of their regime (Brasil, Bolivia)

The balance of political democratizations, then, is contradictory.

On the one hand, and with a few significant exceptions, electoral participation in the region has not decreased in the last decade and reaches over two thirds, if one takes the total number of registered voters, and a few points over 50% if one takes the total of the population with the age to vote, which is relatively acceptable in terms of a comparison with other contexts. Likewise, according to public opinion polls, the acceptance of democracy as the best political regime to live under has not significantly diminished and remains in relatively acceptable percentages. To this, we can add the regularity of elections to choose officials, and, with the noted exceptions, the greater stable political participation, the relative formalization and institutionalization of political processes, a certain potentiality of representation with the emergence in almost all the countries of a system of parties and coalitions that tends to ensure a certain governability.

On the other hand, the characteristics concerning processes where graduality and negotiation play a determinant role, as well as the democratic limitations coming from the authoritarian enclaves, the absence of institutionality and the dominance of de facto powers explain, in part, the frustration of vast sectors and the relatively massive disenchanted vision. Thus, there is the affirmation that although there is an advancement in freedoms, democracy "has not at all changed the lives of people and for them things remain the same". Although the institutions pertaining to democracy are valued, there is also a rather radical critique of the ones existing in each society and their functioning. In some countries the socio-economic crisis has been very deep, not

affecting the social legitimacy of the democratic institutions but the credibility of the political class.

Summing up, beyond the permanence of some problems of political democratizations, and overlapping sometimes with them, the main challenges for democracy in the region can be better defined today in terms of, first, its deepening, this is, extension of the ethical principles and the mechanisms of the democratic regime to other realms of social life; second, its quality, which means participation, representation and satisfaction of the citizenry in the decision-making processes at the local, regional and centralized levels; third, its relevancy, this is, being able to solve the issues pertaining to a political regime through its institutions and not through de facto powers.

Beyond the analysis of democratization processes, what is shown in the Latin American case, is the weakness and troubles of the democratic theory in some historical contexts. This is because such theory was classically thought for one type of society, for a polis. And a polis-society is a space where an economic system, a political organization, a model of identity and cultural diversity and a social structure, co-exists even if in a contradicting way. That is, they are historically shared by a population. This means that it is also the space in which a political community and a center of decisions is defined for those inside of it, called the national State. This is what we call country or society.

Today, this polis finds itself exploded by processes that have to do with globalization and which diminish the margins for maneuver of national States, conditioning them and penetrating societies. This makes for a State relatively severed from society, and actors split between their universal belonging to a socio-cultural category and their belonging to a local, regional, and above all, national State space, of which they still feel a part.

As we have said, we are today in a societal type different from the one we lived during the greater part of this century, and is characterized by combining the industrial-national-State type with the one we called globalized post-industrial. But it so happens, the institutions apt for the national industrial dimension are not necessarily adequate for the globalized post-industrial dimension. Then one must rethink a theory of democracy for a society that combines both of these dimensions. Because the democracy that we know, its mechanisms and its theory, were conceived for a type of society that no longer

exists as the only referent.

The challenges of social democratization.

Democratization has for Latin American societies a classical meaning that relates it more to equalities, belonging, community, cohesion, than to liberal political institutions. Even if today, as we have seen political democracy is re-validated, there is always a demand for what can be called social democratization. This has different meanings, ranging from the redefinition of citizenship beyond classical rights, to the overcoming of new forms of exclusion and the recomposition of social actors or reinforcement of civil society.

In first place, the traditional concept of citizenship suffers an expansion of values upon the affirmation of new rights that exceed the classical civic, political or social economic (for example gender, environment, local and supra national spaces, ethnic identity, rights related to age, etc.) areas; but for which there are neither institutions nor organizations to validate them.

In second place, we are facing a kind of modernity and globalization which is at the same time excluding and uniformizing. There is a progressive duality of humanity and of societies in terms of those that stay “in” and those that are “out”, the included and excluded, accompanied by a homogenization of the world, because of the imposition of a model of modernity (the North American version of the western model) through economic and mediating powers. But this exclusion is of a new type, that is not related to exploitation or domination, but simply they are “expelled people”, without an structural, ideological or organizational basis for collective action.

In third place, the socio-economic transformations of the last decades and the political and cultural changes have profoundly modified the panorama of social actors. Classical actors have lost part of their social significance and tend to become corporate. Those emergent around the new post-authoritarian issues do not succeed in constituting themselves into stable actors or corpus of citizens, appearing, rather, as eventual publics. In situations like these, the social actors proper, tend to be replaced by sporadic mobilizations and fragmentary and defensive actions, sometimes in the shape of

networks and social webs, significant but with a low political institutionalization and representation, or by individual reactions of a consumerist or withdrawal type. On the other hand, the scene is taken by the aggregation of individuals through the phenomenon of public opinion, measured through polls and mediated, not by mobilizing or representative organizations, but by the mass media.

The dismantling of the classical matrix and the end of democratic transitions, generate a situation in which a unifying principle of social action disappears and in which, on the contrary, the different principles diversify and even enter in contradiction in some cases (environment versus growth, to name just one example), each one of them expressing itself in different actors.

The conformation of actors can no longer be thought of in the styles of the past. One must recognize that it is almost impossible to find one single social or political subject or actor, around which a single field of tensions and contradictions is generated, that articulates the different principles and orientations of action springing from the processes of social modernization and democratization.

While it is true that it will no longer be possible to return to the traditional collective action, even though many of its elements can be rescued, there are potentials in the new situation for a redefinition of citizenship and a new way of conceiving collective action. What is pending is the relation of these manifestations with political life, reason why the institutionalization of spaces where classical forms express themselves together with emerging forms, seems indispensable. The paradox lies in that this can only be effected from politics and its actors, however problematic that may be.

The redefinition of the socio-economic model

The old model of "inward" development, based on the action of the State as agent of development and industrialization, had been momentarily replaced by the reinsertion of the national economies in the process of globalization of the world economy, based on the transnational market forces. This meant a greater autonomy of the economy in regards to the inward development model, but left society entirely at the mercy of the transnational economic powers

This, because the predominant mode in which the transformation has been effected has been adjustment or structural reforms of a neo-liberal kind. But the neo-liberal modalities have meant only the partial insertion and new dependency of certain sectors, with which a society of a dual type is again configured and the issue of a new model of development raised. Said in other words, the neo-liberal model operated as a rupture and showed its total failure to become a stable and self-sustaining development. The concept of "transition to a market economy" was also an ideological instrument that identified a particular way of adjusting the economy in times of crisis to a new and alternative development model.

The current crisis of some countries are only an illustration of a more general situation where the policies of IMF, implementing the "Washington consensus" have totally failed. The question is what kind of development is possible for Latin American societies in the globalized world and whether is it possible for each separate country to overcome this failure or they are forced to an integrated economic policy vis a vis the global powers.

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A Latin American model of modernity?

By modernity, we understand the way in which a society constitutes its subjects. Modernity is the affirmation of subjects, individual or collective, builders of their own history. So the modernity of a society refers to the way in which social subjects are constituted, which in general tends to be a combination of rational, expressive-subjective and identity or historical memory dimensions. Modernization should be defined as the process by which each society constitutes its own modernity, without falling in the mistake of identifying it with the processes of rationalization, technologization and secularization particular to western modernity in its European and North American varieties. In other words, modernization, except for some historical models, is not necessarily determined by the rupture with traditions nor by production and use of determined objects and instruments. It is not adequate to speak of "modernity" but rather "modernities" or "models of modernity". We cannot speak of "the" modernization but different processes that can or not fit within known modernizations.

The particular form of Latin American modernity, around what we will call the State-national-popular matrix, is in crisis and, as proposal facing it, arises the simple copy of the model of modernity identified with specific processes of modernization in developed countries, but with a special emphasis on the North American consumption and mass culture model. Opposing this, also primitively and onesidedly, is the vision of a Latin American modernity identified either with a "deep" Latin America of indigenous root, or with a social base that is racial mix and with a particular subject that is the Catholic Church.. Indeed, Latin American model of modernity, if it exists, combines embryonarily several features, among others: the construction of societies by the State; the elimination of the "ethnic nation" by the "civic nation"; an aspect that today is dramatically changing; the deficit of instrumental rationality; the crucial role of politics as the cohesive element of society, the vocation of social integration with a permanent memory of exclusion, the comunitarian and egalitarian democratic ethos subordinating the liberal one, the capacity of absorbing western cultures and blending it with original elements, certain historical landmarks that crosses all their societies, even with different chronological sequences and timing.

Contemporary societies, among them Latin American, are going through to different extents, from a model of modernity based on the industrial society of a national State to a societal type that combines the previous model with dimensions of globalized post-industrial society through the filter of cultural identities and historical memory that constitute them as national communities. At the same time, development as a process of transformation of a given society, stops identifying itself with the model of economic growth and takes on very different elements of society, where the concept of quality of life exemplifies this complexity. In turn, economic development no longer depends only on social and resource mobilization on the part of the national State and actors organized around it, but also on the forces of transnational markets.

So, modernity can no longer be defined by identifying it with historical models of modernization or to only one of its sources, be it the most rationalist or instrumental one, the most expressive or the sole historical memory of a national identity. Each society combines these three dimensions in a different way and "invents" its own modernity. The question for Latin America society is whether they will able or not to

construct its model of modernity, at country and the whole region level, in order to enter autonomously in the globalized world.

Latin America in the globalized world.

Let us remind that the current process of globalization has two characteristics that are not essential part of any process of globalization but reflects the real power situation in the world. The first is geo-political, and consists in the unilateral hegemony of the United States. The second is ideological and socio-economic and is based in the hegemony of the neo-liberal model.. Giving these two features it is impossible that single countries could integrate themselves to the globalization dynamic without a growing process of fragmentation and loss of identity and cohesion. The condition for an autonomous integration to the global world is, like the Europeans have showed us, some kind of unity through big blocks or multi State-nations spaces. And looking at the structural transformations and unlike other centuries experiences, these blocks will be more of a cultural, modernity model dimension, than geo-political based on military power or even geo-economic based on markets.

So, there is no future for Latin American societies without the constitution of a solid block among their States and nations. The basis of this have already been indicated. But this integration is a gradual process that need to recognize at least three main axis. One should be organized around the leadership of Mexico, and comprises Central America. The other is the Andean Community of countries. The third is based on Mercosur and led by Brazil. The problem of the first is the temptation of Mexico to become absorbed by USA. The problem of the second axis is the deep social crisis of many of their societies and the absence of leadership. The problem of the third is the isolationist tendency of Brazil, the profound crisis of Argentina and the dangerous vision of a Chilean autonomous capacity for negotiating by itself with the other blocks.

Indeed the main problem is the lack of a general vision that combines the necessary reinforcement of each national State capacity with the acceptance of the common destiny of all these societies.