

"The Problems that Concern Us Are Really Bi-National"

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An interview with Senator Hugo B. Margáin

While the right-wing hysteria generated by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina) in the United States widened the gulf between the two countries, some cooler heads have prevailed on both sides of the border. Recently, the creation of a new Bi-National Mexico-United States Commission was announced to take on the difficult problems that separate us. The Mexican side of the Commission will be presided by Senator Hugo B. Margáin, a leading expert on bi-national relations who has twice been posted as Mexican ambassador in the U.S. (1964-70 and 1976-82). Finance Minister from 1970 to 1973, Senator Margáin has also been governor of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and ambassador to Great Britain from 1973 to 1976. Amid preparations for the Commission's first session, to be held in October, Senator Margáin recently spoke with VOICES OF MEXICO's Director, Mariclaire Acosta. Excerpts:

In the last several months, there has been talk of setting up a Mexico-U.S. bi-national commission. What can you tell us about it?

A group of experts and public figures from both countries who share concerns regarding our bilateral relations decided to design a project, which has taken the form of a commission to study the future of Mexico-U.S. relations. The commission is autonomous. That is, its members participate as individuals, and not as institutional or governmental representatives. It is a non-profit association, which receives both private and public funding.

Our commission has the following objectives: to study and be able to anticipate the possible characteristics and trends in Mexico-U.S. relations during the next twenty-five years; to draw up recommendations for the citizens and governments of both countries, which promote mutual, long-term interests for both Mexico and the United States; to improve communications between influential citizens from both countries; to promote mutual understanding between present and future

generations of both countries; and to encourage the exchange of information, as well as of research regarding problems of common interest. It is important to emphasize that the project will in no way intervene in the internal matters of either country.

Senator, how is the commission structured?

The commission is composed of an equal number of distinguished citizens from both countries. It will be jointly presided by the honorable William D. Rogers (Secretary of State during the Nixon Administration) and myself. Mr. Rogers has a deep understanding of Mexico, acquired through his years of private law practice, which brought him into repeated contact with us.

In addition, the Mexican commissioners include well-known figures from academic, intellectual, political and business circles. They are Mario Ojeda, Carlos Fuentes, Hector Aguilar Camín, Socorro Díaz, Ernesto Fernández Hurtado, Juan José Bremer, Fernando Canales Clarión and Gilberto Borja. They represent a mosaic of the country's most important political schools of thought. We also know that Robert McNamara, Mayor Henry Cisneros, Roger Heynes of the University of California, Kansas Senator Nancy Kassebaum and communications union leader, Glenn Watts have agreed to be commissioners from the United States. And we are still waiting for further confirmations.

Each country will have an office with its respective academic committee. On the Mexican side, the director will be Rosario Green, a specialist in our country's external financial relations. The U.S. counterpart will be Peter Smith, who has a profound understanding of the Mexican political system. Jorge Bustamante, Cassio Luisselli, Carlos Rico and Guadalupe Gonzalez will make up the committee from our side, while Wayne Cornelius, Martha Tienda, John Coatsworth and William Cline will participate from the U.S. side.

Senator, what are the most important issues that the commission will discuss?

We hope to identify the fundamental problems between the two countries. We

have an open agenda, in which we will include such issues as pollution, border problems, commerce, drug trafficking, the migration of Mexican workers to the U.S., the understanding needed by Mexican-Americans in the United States, technology and cultural exchanges.

Our method will be to begin by identifying the problems in each of these areas. Then, we will attempt to project their development over the next twenty-five years. It will really be a reflection group whose basic premise is that the problems which we are examining are truly bi-national. That is, they depend on the interaction between both countries. As a result, they can only be resolved by bilateral actions that take into account the interests of both countries.

We want to hold periodic working meetings to discuss the studies being carried out by the members of our respective academic committees. These meetings will alternate between Mexico and the United States. They will be closed sessions, in which we will be able to air different points of view, in the hopes, of course, of reaching some agreements. The results of our discussions will be made available for the general public in both countries, at opportune times.

For now, we expect to present a document with our findings by about the end of 1988. It will be a kind of "position paper," to take advantage of a special moment for Mexico-U.S. relations: new administrations will be inaugurated in both countries at about the same time (in Mexico, on December 1, 1988; and in the U.S. on January 20, 1989). Ob-

viously, we hope to have a positive effect on decisions to be made by the new governments.

What do you consider to be the most urgent problems for the commission to deal with?

There are several. Migration, for example, is one. There, a substantial difference lies in the fact that for us, Mexican migratory workers are "undocumented workers," while for the United States, they are "illegals." In this case, the solution is not only for Mexico to resolve its employment problems. The United States must also stop needing and attracting cheap labor.

Another problem is drug traffic. Here, as in the previous case, we have a shared problem that can only be resolved through parallel and complementary actions. The enormous drug consumption in the U.S. must be attacked, and not only production in Mexico. Mr. Helms (Senator Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican) is only seeing one side of the problem when he thinks that if drug production is stopped in our country and in the rest of Latin America, the problem will disappear in the U.S. That is entirely false. As long as the United States is one of the major consumers of drugs in the world, there will continue to be drug producers.

Let me give you an example of this. With the Nixon administrations' famous "Operation Intercept," the only thing that happened is that the price of marijuana went up in the U.S., thus improving business for drug dealers. To give another example. What were the results when, under pressure from the



Senator Margáin: Our problems are really bi-national.

U.S. government, we fumigated marijuana plantations with paraquat? Marijuana users demonstrated in front of our embassy in Washington and threw acid on the flowers in the embassys' gardens in protest for the harm caused by smoking "our" marijuana. The pressure was so strong that U.S. officials finally asked our Attorney General at that time, Oscar Flores Sánchez, to please stop spraying the plantations. "What do you want us to do," responded Flores Sánchez, "give them vitamins?"

We also have problems in our commercial relations. For example, so long as the U.S. does not modify its protectionist schemes, Mexico's needs to develop and expand its exports will continue to create a conflictive climate. In addition, Mexico is preparing to enter the GATT. This will require a reexamination of the conditions for trade between the two countries, and the situation will need to be studied.

There are cultural problems as well. Despite the fact that we are neighbors, we really don't understand each other. We need to open channels for cultural communication through exchanges of professors and students, through the press, radio and television, etc.

Another interesting problem arises here, which has to do with the border: the question of the identity of Mexican-Americans, who represent that part of Mexico which the United States has not been able to absorb, even after so many years.

Each country's foreign policy is another important area.

I remember one Christmas, when I was still Ambassador, we were all together at Mr. Kissinger's house (former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger). Then Mr. Haig (former Secretary of State, Alexander Haig) came over, took me by the arm and as we moved away from the group, asked me why our position on Central America is so important to us. I answered that negotiation based on the principles of self-determination and non-intervention is a dogma for Mexico. He responded by saying that for them, containing Soviet expansionism is also a dogma. Well, I said to him, I guess we can't do much else but respect each others' dogmas; but don't forget that force is ineffective, that dialog is the irreplaceable road to peace.

And that is the most difficult aspect of our bilateral relations: when we must make it clear to the United States that our principles have an historical basis. We have been dismembered. And they want us to forget that. And that is the case because they have a hegemonic position which they have yet to fully assume. That is, they do not have the technical, and especially, the cultural resources to be able to exert their hegemony.

It is different from the situation of Spain or Great Britain, who in their time, did fully assume their imperial nature.

Mexico is, then, a country mutilated from the south and from the north, but which is beginning to break out from its tendency to only look inward. We have, for example, the Tlatelolco Agreement, which establishes Mexico as the only nuclear-free zone on the planet. Or we can take our efforts as part of the Contadora Group, the only option for a peaceful and negotiated settlement for the Central American conflict. All of these efforts are guided by principles deeply rooted in our history. Porfirio Díaz (Mexico's President from 1876-1910) said it all, years ago: "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States." And also Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada (Mexico's President after the revolution led by Benito Juárez in 1857), who commented regarding the construction of the northbound railroad, that it would be better just to build the rail lines from coast to coast; that way we would be able to maintain the desert that separates us from the U.S. 'Between Mexico and the United States, the desert,' he said. Well, all of that is part of the historical legacy that will surely come up and that will be debated bilaterally for the first time.

How is this commission different from others established in the past to deal with bilateral matters?

Well, not everything has been negative in Mexico-U.S. relations. We have a legacy of precedents for good bilateral relations. For example, regarding El Chamizal, desalinization, and the Waters and Territorial Limits Commission.* those were unique models of bilateral understanding. The fight against hoof and mouth disease is another example. We will study all of these experiences, refer to them in the work we do and evaluate their positive and negative features. It is necessary to draw on this rich experience in the search for joint solutions to our mutual problems, systematize it and transform it into a common legacy. We will be working with ideas, which is very important. Ideas have tremendous power. Besides, in the realm of ideas, we are all equals. Like all the rest of the commissions' members, I have great trust in the strength of ideas; and I am convinced that we can air our different points of view within the implacable logic of reason★

*El Chamizal was an undefined zone along the border between the two countries; a settlement defining the dividing line was reached and an agreement signed by Presidents John F. Kennedy (1960-63) and Adolfo López Mateos (1958-64). The desalinization refers to the process by which the salt was extracted from the Colorado River so that it could be used for irrigation without harming crops in Sonora. The Waters and Territorial Limits Commission is a permanent commission that deals with any territorial disputes that may arise along the border between Mexico and the United States.