

# OUR VOICE

In recent decades, bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States have reached unprecedented depth and intensity. Meetings between both countries' heads of state are more and more frequent, and high-level groups of officials, academics and experts from both sides of the border have proliferated to study and propose lines of action about the different issues on the bilateral agenda. This may well be due to the recent processes of political modernization, economic globalization and stepped-up regional trade.

Drug trafficking, the migration of Mexicans to the United States and regional trade in the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been the central items on the agenda. The fact, however, that they are not the only questions under consideration is shown by President Zedillo's recent visit to his U.S. counterpart, a trip assessed in an article in this issue of *Voices of Mexico*.

Some of the topics which are beginning to push to the fore are the protection of Mexican nationals in the United States; the extradition of individuals sought by law enforcement officials in both countries; the solution to trade, environmental or labor disputes in the framework of NAFTA; the establishment of maritime boundaries for territorial waters in the Gulf of Mexico; the fight against arms trafficking in the hemisphere; and respect for immigrants' human rights. All these questions must be discussed in the framework of respectful, productive bilateral relations.

For this very reason, *Voices of Mexico* has decided to include in this issue a summary of the presentation made to the Senate by Mexico's new ambassador to the United States, Jesús Reyes Heróles, on the occasion of the ratification of his appointment. The new Mexican diplomat expounds his view of the bilateral relationship as well as the Mexican government's position on both the new and old points on the agenda. His interest in presenting a program that will include the creation of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms for solving problems, as well as the consolidation of already existing mechanisms, is clear. This objective is situated in the framework of the idea that the most productive way of moving forward is the recognition that the issues which affect one or more nations, like drug trafficking, immigration, international trade or human rights, require bilateral and multilateral solutions and that implementing unilateral measures, such as the U.S. certification process, will only hurt relations among countries without having proven their effectiveness. Undoubtedly, the two problems in Mexico-U.S. bilateral relations which have captured the attention of the press, the media and the public in both countries are illegal immigration of Mexican citizens into the United States and the fight against drug trafficking. This issue of the magazine has given over its "Society" section to two articles by Mexican experts on these questions. Researcher Remedios Gómez Arnau explains the advances and conclusions of the document presented by the Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs of the Bilateral Mexico-U.S. Commission. In this first Mexico-U.S. Study on Migration, perhaps the most significant step forward, according to Gómez Arnau, is the willingness on both parts to analyze the problem from the neutral perspective of the social sciences, in an attempt to obliterate its irremedia-

ble political content. In this sense, the author asks herself the question: Is conceptualization of the issue by both countries' moving from understanding migration to cooperation? Silvia Vélez Quero, also a researcher at the UNAM Center for Research on North America (CISAN), analyzes the struggle against narcotics from a geostrategic perspective. Without disdaining the importance of the problem for the Americas, Vélez maintains that the U.S. strategy for fighting drugs has magnified it out of proportion in order to design mechanisms which guarantee U.S. military and economic geostrategic control over the nations of Latin America. This would explain not only the U.S. Congress' insistence on continuing to "certify" other countries, but also the constant and sometimes excessive presence of the topic in the U.S. media. It may be that, as the article suggests, the United States has found the great new enemy it needs to replace communism.

Another challenge of the era of globalization is the modernization of political systems and the resulting consolidation of democracies in the world. In the "Politics" section, we have included three articles dealing with the consolidation of democracy in Mexico. Carlos Elizondo shares his reflections on the dilemmas faced by the National Action Party (PAN) in the new context of Mexican politics. While the PAN is the opposition party with the longest and most profound tradition, its new-found strength and occupation of governor's mansions and city halls in several states nationwide mean, on the one hand, it must subject itself to the judgement of the ballot box as a government and, on the other, reformulate its alliances in a scenario in which, according to Elizondo, almost any decision could be counterproductive. In his article, political scholar René Millán asks whether Mexican society will modernize and, with that as his starting point, analyzes recent political changes in the country in terms of processes of social differentiation. He maintains that it is only very recently that the role of the state has become differentiated from the characteristics of the nation, in a process in which the different components of the state (the three branches of government, political parties, social actors, etc.) have begun to situate themselves functionally and autonomously within the new institutions and rules of the game, as a result of the political transformations which have led to a more democratic system than the previous one. The question is whether these changes can really be consolidated into institutions and laws that make them last. Finally, jurist Emilio O. Rabasa reviews the July 6, 1997 elections and the divided federal government that was their result (the president from one party and a Chamber of Deputies with an opposition majority). Rabasa warns of the consequences for governability that could arise from not adapting the Constitution to the new situation.

Our "Economic Issues" section deals with a topic linked to globalization and economic integration. Alejandro Mercado Celis presents an analysis of the development of maquiladora plants on Mexico's northern border. He specifically looks at the case of Tijuana and presents an interesting hypothesis about the role of specialization in industrial processes which, technological modernization aside, force companies to develop more sophisticated management systems in order to survive in increasingly competitive surroundings.

"From time immemorial, the peoples of Mesoamerica were captivated by the heavens," write Jesús Galindo Trejo and Arcadio Poveda Ricalde in their article "Comets in Pre-Hispanic Mexico." Theirs is a profound, rigorous and well documented article about pre-Columbian cosmology, in which comets were interpreted by priest-astronomers as signs of catastrophe and devastation. Galindo and Poveda tell of comets observed by the peoples of Mesoamerica, particularly the Mexicas, and are so precise that, by comparing their records with those of other cultures, they are able to pinpoint sightings of the famous Halley's Comet.

"Science, Art and Culture" includes two contributions on the work of the young Mexican painter Alberto Castro Leñero. Luis Rius writes him a letter presenting a panorama of his painting and discussing some ideas about Mexican contemporary plastic arts. For his part, another critic, Juan Manuel Springer, describes the artist's themes, the motivations and the contributions to the plastic arts by reviewing for our readers his mobile exhibition, "Inner Castle," which toured the United States and Canada. Both articles clearly show that Castro Leñero has become one of the most important young exponents of Mexican art because of his original approach to the theme that most obsesses him: the human body, concretely

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women's bodies. His conceptual treatment of his topic is more related to the unconscious, which he dilutes in textures and colors and molds in unusual materials and formats, like the shape of a "T" or a cross, which fills his work with clearly Christian allusions. At the same time, his allusions to eroticism are also worth noting, not as a discourse but as an emotional, sensitive charge which manages to transmit to the viewer the idea that the desire for possession can also be visual, that it is possible to love with the eyes and not only with the touch.

The section continues with an article about the celebration of Fourteenth Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center in March 1998. The festival, similar to the ones in almost all of Europe's ancient cities, will include artistic and cultural events from Mexico and abroad of outstanding quality and variety.

Mexico City's Historic Center is rich in architecture. In our "History" section, we have included an interesting article by historian Gisela von Wobeser about Mexico City housing and realty in the eighteenth century. She explains the way the inhabitants lived and their customs shortly before the end of New Spain's colonial period. José Reyes Méndez also contributes an article about one of the buildings that most incorporate the history of Mexico, the Alhóndiga de Granaditas. In the city of Guanajuato in central Mexico, it was the scene of the first battle during the independence movement of 1810.

In "The Splendor of Mexico," we offer our readers an article by James Olsen about one of Mexico's most widely recognized and original art forms: feather art from the Amanteca area, famous internationally for its craftsmen's masterful, imaginative, colorful work with tropical bird feathers. One of the Mexican people's most cherished, well preserved traditions is the fiesta of the Day of the Dead celebrated each year on November 1 and 2. Its typical altars and offerings are testimony to Mexicans' great ability to translate their emotions and beliefs into art. We therefore include in this issue an article about an altar to the dead erected in the National University to honor and express respect for that tradition. This year's university offering was dedicated to the state of Oaxaca and the *Niño Pa* (Child Pa), an image venerated for the last 400 years by the inhabitants of Xochimilco, in southern Mexico City. The section closes with the reproduction of the winning drawings in the contest sponsored by the Foreign Relations Ministry for children of Mexican descent, from 7 to 13 years of age, residing in the United States. The contest's theme was "This Is My Mexico." The size of the response and the quality and imagination displayed in the children's work were surprising, and *Voices of Mexico* decided to support it and its aim of fostering patriotic values beyond our borders.

In this issue, "Museums" is dedicated to the La Bola House Museum, one of the few buildings in Mexico which can boast of having preserved not only its original four-century-old structure, but also the spirit of its residents through its furniture, art work and everyday items. Despite the march of time, they retain the pride passed down to them from their days of glory.

The axolote is an animal of Mexico which has surprised natives and foreigners alike with its biological and nutritive properties, which have even been studied in the most important biology labs in the world. A survivor of the remote past, it has been kept as a pet in aquariums and attributed mystical and healing properties, among them —according to the renowned historian of the colonial period, Friar Bernardino de Sahagún— that of being a very potent aphrodisiac. An article about the axolote by Edgar Anaya Rangel begins our "Ecology" section. Also in this section is an article by Sol Ortíz García and Daniel Piñero about Mexico's enormous biodiversity, particularly the pine; as the authors say, the great variety of pines is a gift from Mexico to the world which should be preserved through rational and sustainable forest management.

Rosario Castellanos is perhaps the most important and most widely recognized woman writer in twentieth century Mexican letters. *Voices of Mexico* pays homage to her here with the translation and publication of a chapter of the recent Alfaguara edition of her previously unpublished novel *Rito de iniciación* (Initiation Rite), 23 years after her death. We hope in this way to bring the English-speaking public closer to one of the most profound and transcendental writers in the Spanish language.