

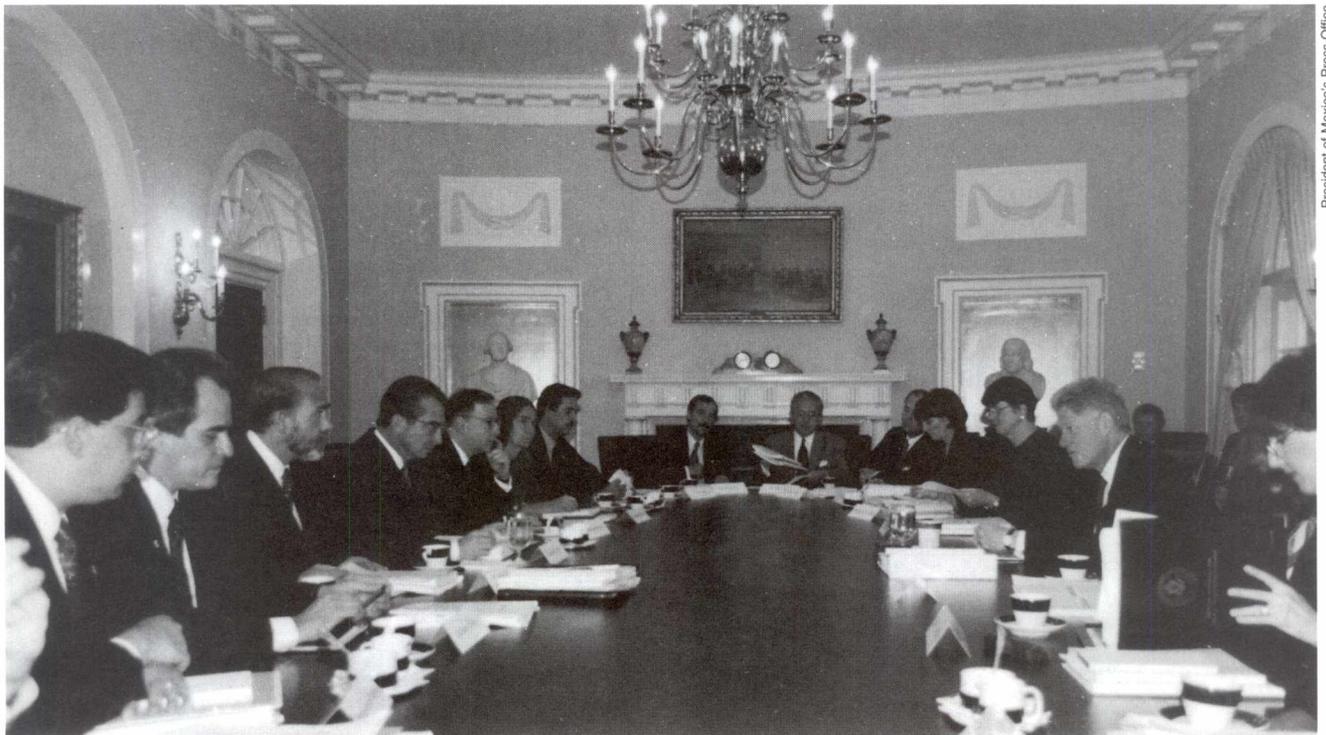
President Zedillo's U.S. Visit Yields Three Accords

Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo visited his U.S. counterpart Bill Clinton November 13 and 14, 1997. Partially because of economic globalization and the regionalization of trade in North America, bilateral relations between the two countries have become deeper and more intense: this trip was the fifth meeting between the two heads of state in the three years of the Zedillo administration.

Usually the two main topics on the bilateral agenda are immigration and drug trafficking. But on this occasion, other topics were included and three important agreements signed:

a convention on fighting illicit arms traffic, which affects the whole hemisphere, and two protocols, one on maritime boundaries and another on temporary extradition.

Although President Zedillo's visit did not fill the U.S. printed and broadcast media like other visits in the past, its results were satisfactory. For the new Mexican ambassador to the United States, Jesús Reyes Heróles, one of the main objectives of the meeting was to review the advances of the Binational Commission and its 16 working groups, among them the High-Level Group on Drug Trafficking and the Binational Commission on Migration Studies.



President of Mexico's Press Office

The most noteworthy of the agreements signed is the Interamerican Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, a Mexican initiative before the Organization of American States approved unanimously with the decided support of the U.S. president. Given that the majority of the conventional firearms confiscated in Latin America from drug traffickers, organized crime and armed rebel groups are of U.S. manufacture, the Mexican proposal and the support from its neighboring northern power are a decided step forward in the struggle against the crime devastating the region. In addition, given the undoubted link between drug and arms trafficking, President Clinton's attitude could be interpreted as a positive change in the traditional U.S. slant on the drug issue. In that sense, the presidents' joint statement points out that "the reduction of the demand and confronting the drug infrastructure within the United States must be a key part of bilateral strategy on this issue." This is explicit—and novel—recognition that the drug problem is a bilateral or multilateral issue and that, therefore, multilateral solutions must also be sought. President Zedillo himself referred to the need not to review, but to transcend, the certification process in favor of greater and improved cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking. That is why the ratification of the hemisphere-wide convention on the arms trade was important; among other things, it will compel countries to ensure that arms not enter, leave or pass through their territory unless marked with individual serial numbers and whoever carries them is licensed to do so.

The Treaty on Maritime Boundaries is important in the context of the definition of sovereignty over territorial waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The concrete terms of the agreement have not been made public yet, which in Mexico has caused some discontentment, above all because of the economic importance of the decision: ostensibly the agreement will contain specifications on the area of the gulf known as Doma's Hole which has proven to harbor enormous oil reserves. The area has been claimed by both nations and, seemingly, the majority belongs to Mexico according to current international and maritime law. The concrete agreements stemming from the negotiations will be important to look at since the area could even be deemed international waters. The gas and oil deposits in the area have been estimated as the fourth largest in the world.

In the last place, the Protocol to the Extradition Treaty is part of the fight against drug trafficking and other kinds of organized crime and formalizes the procedure for extraditing citizens of either country who commit crimes in the other, as well as the return of citizens who, having broken the law and fled from justice in their own country, take refuge in the neighboring country, in an attempt to protect themselves using its laws. The Mexican delegation emphasized that this was a general agreement, not directed at any group in particular, when the press inquired about the extradition proceedings pending against politician Mario Ruiz Massieu, arrested by U.S. law enforcement agencies and whose return has been demanded by Mexico for the last three years.

The Mexican government made the visit having prepared firm positions on many other issues on the bilateral agenda. On the question of immigration, then, the joint presidential statement emphasizes "the establishment of appropriate procedures on the border and in the interior of the United States for safe, orderly repatriation of Mexican nationals, fully respecting their dignity, human rights and the principle of family unity." Zedillo and Clinton also agreed to hold a series of conferences to analyze immigration strategies with a new focus linking the question to economic development. Clinton committed his government to design informational campaigns about the right of Mexican citizens to obtain consular assistance, as the Convention of Vienna stipulates.

Other important issues like trade and cultural and technological cooperation were also touched on. Through President Zedillo, the U.S. president sent a message to all the Latin American presidents about the Free Trade Area of the Americas saying he would continue to push for it despite the U.S. Congress' refusal to grant him the fast track status he had proposed.

President Zedillo also took advantage of the trip to meet with Mexico's 42 consuls in the United States about the protection of Mexican nationals north of the border. He also addressed meetings of businessmen and representatives of Canadian and U.S. chambers of commerce about the political and economic changes in Mexico over the last three years, emphasizing the consolidation of the democratic system and the end of the period of economic recovery, which has given way to one of sustained growth. ■■■