

OUR VOICE

In the last three years, relations between Mexico and the United States have been rocky, full of missteps and unfulfilled goals. Even though both countries' strategic affairs are considered shared problems, no agreements have been reached about solutions: while for one of the actors some measures are urgent and necessary, the other thinks they are secondary and can be put off. This is the negation not only these measures but also of the main strategic priorities that two neighbors should maintain on their agendas.

It should be mentioned that the strategic proposal about relations with the United States initially made by President Vicente Fox's administration was very important. It planned a substantial political approximation of a dimension that —conditions permitting— could have fostered a historic change in bilateral relations and in the way that the United States was perceived in Mexico in order to then deal with substantial points of the agenda like migration and closer trade ties through the possible reformulation of some of NAFTA's central issues. At the same time, from the time he took office, President George W. Bush's government proposed to strengthen the relationship and even showed signs that it considered that conditions existed for building a special relationship. Both a new government in Mexico with fresh ideas about foreign policy and the initiation of a U.S. administration optimistic about bilateral relations made possible an initial climate of understanding and harmony that led to growing expectations about the future.

Although the September 11 terrorist attacks were not the direct nor the main cause of the interruption of what looked like a special relationship, nor that the negotiations about some of the particular issues on the agenda like migration significantly diminished in intensity, it can be argued that they critically exposed the general climate of bilateral relations to important risks. In any case, there was very little time to find out how relations could have developed in the new historic moment. On the one hand, partly because of its surprise at the events themselves, but mainly because of a lack of sensitivity in reacting as a good neighbor to the tragedy, Mexico's government lost the qualitative and quantitative ground it had gained in the previous months. On the other hand, Washington understandably reacted vigorously to the tragedy vis-à-vis the outside world although, in the case of Mexico, with inexplicable superficiality given the fact that in any reasonable bilateral relationship the high-level issues remain on the agenda regardless of the circumstances if we attend to the professionalism they demand. Washington did not do that and Mexico did not know how to respond in time to that new situation; as a result, Mexico could not negotiate a middle ground as opposed to the all-or-nothing policy the United States rigidly put forward. Inevitably, relations were limited to support or non-support for the United States.

It would seem that now there is a possible space opening up for reconciliation. The recent telephone conversation between the two presidents and their agreement to have new talks during their trip to Asia may make for new possibilities in bilateral relations that we should pay attention to. However, two things could negatively affect the future possibilities of this new situation. On the one hand, the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California has already had an effect on the debate about migration, tremendously tensing the local political climate with effects on the bilateral negotiations in the matter. It will undoubtedly also have an effect on relations between the two presidents and their negotiating teams. If we add to this that it is very probable that President Bush seeks to make up for lost time with Mexico and come to at least a minimal migratory accord —for purely electoral reasons and eventually to thank Mexico's vote in the Security Council in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 1511 on Iraq's future which was adopted unanimously by the 15-member council— we can say that the possibility of coming to agreements is substantially limited and demands that the Mexican government display political creativity that it has not shown up until now, which puts at risk the aim of achieving fundamental advances on the bilateral agenda during this presidential term. This scenario could even make for a historic reversal in relations with the United States that could be difficult to revert in the short future.

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In effect, since September 11, Mexico-U.S. relations stopped being a priority for our neighbors; they have concentrated all their energy on the international scene on the war against terrorism and the occupation of Iraq. As we have already mentioned, matters like the negotiation of a migratory agreement or the trade and economic integration of the Americas have taken a back seat. However, not everything is negative in the prospects for bilateral relations, as veteran Mexican diplomat, Ambassador Andrés Rozental points out in a lecture on this topic that we publish in this issue's "Mexico-U.S. Relations" section. For Rozental, it is no longer viable to negotiate "the full enchilada" in migratory matters, as was the intention before 9/11, but it is possible and a good idea for both nations to come to agreements that benefit both, such as regularizing the migratory status of hundreds of thousands of our compatriots living illegally in the United States today, in exchange for Mexico's cooperation in the efforts to build a secure border. In this same section, we publish a preview of Mexican political scientist José Antonio Aguilar Rivera's research on consciousness and attitudes about diversity in the United States and Mexico. In the country that fostered the "melting pot" Rivera points to a general tendency to build particular ethnic identities and to not mix the races. In the case of Mexico, the famous "cosmic race" or the exaltation of mestization as an ideology and a search for a homogeneous national identity hides a culture of discrimination against and isolation of indigenous ethnic groups.

In "United States Affairs", Mónica Vereá contributes an article exploring temporary Mexican agricultural workers programs in the United States. Her analysis puts the issue of migration in the context of the broad spectrum of U.S. national security, the only way today to negotiate migratory agreements in both nations' interests. Celina Bárcenas, for her part, explains the growing importance to Mexico's economy of Mexicans' remittances sent from the United States; they have become the country's main source of hard currency, surpassing oil and tourism, totalling more than U.S.\$10 billion a year, which unfortunately, is almost completely absorbed by household expenses and not in productive investment for development. The section concludes with an article by Sergio Casanueva and Stephen E. Wetlesen about the use and abuse of the term "Hispanic," and its ideological and political implications for the Latino-origin population in the United States. In "Canadian Issues" we also present a contribution about Mexican migration. In this case, Rosa María Vanegas' article centers on seasonal agricultural workers hired in Canada who, contrary to what many think, suffer from exploitative working conditions and mistreatment, while the Mexican government does nothing to alleviate them.

Three years into and halfway through the presidential term, the Fox administration cannot be said to have many achievements to its credit. In part because of the fact that the party in office is a minority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and in part because of the president's and the cabinet's inability to come to agreements with other political actors, the self-styled "government of change" has not been capable of implementing the transformations the country requires. The disenchantment of the citizenry has been such that it is undoubtedly part of the explanation behind the electoral debacle of the National Action Party (PAN) in the mid-term elections, in which the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) made a comeback, showing unexpected signs of vitality even though it had been deposed after 70 years in office.

The structural reforms promised from the beginning of the administration (in energy, the country's tax and financial systems, politics and elections, labor matters and telecommunications) have not gotten through Congress. In our "Politics" section we present two articles that reflect on the first three years of Fox's presidency, written by well known Mexican political analysts. Leonardo Curzio looks at some paradoxes of the Fox administration, such as the fact that at the same time that he is very popular, the president has not managed to avert the revenge votes against the party that ushered him into office. In his article, José Antonio Crespo offers a panorama of probable scenarios for the political agreements needed to push through the reforms, none of which is very encouraging. It will be very interesting, he comments, to see what the PRI position is now that it once again has a chance of recovering the presidency in 2006. The section closes with a contribution from Rosío Vargas and Víctor Rodríguez about the consequences and arguments behind the energy reform, promoted by the government even using strategies that do not stop at the state itself violating the rule of law.

It is true that the Fox administration has faced difficult moments. The recession in the United States and September 11 have undoubtedly been contributing factors to its bad performance and lack of tangible

results benefitting the public, but we cannot overlook that internal factors also exist, such as the ineffectiveness and lack of political coordination and even sometimes of social sensitivity of a cabinet more interested in reaching its macro-economic goals than dealing with the population's needs. One of the most obvious and painful expressions of this, historic levels of unemployment, is analyzed by economist Enrique Pino in his contribution to the "Economy" section. Here, we also publish an article by specialist María Cristina Rosas about the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancún and the fate of the Doha international trade accords, at risk after the tremendous failure of the negotiations.

In "Society", Rubén García Clarck presents an analysis of the results of the Ministry of the Interior's most recent survey on political culture. He easily finds reasons to be on the alert around issues like the public's perception of Mexico's nascent democracy, its extremely low level of trust in almost all political actors and its scant interest in politics and civic participation in general, none of which is good news for the consolidation of democracy in Mexico. The same section also includes an article by Simone Lucatello about the extremely delicate matter of production, trafficking and consumption of drugs along Mexico's northern border, as well as the problems they bring with them such as the exponential increase in violence and the deterioration of social and community life that have unfortunately placed some of our border cities among those with the world's highest crime rates.

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Mexican-American identity is not a fixed set of attitudes, beliefs, opinions and forms of behavior. Neither is it a uniform political or aesthetic position. It is, rather, a diffuse imaginary in which an enormous diversity of world views and artistic and literary forms of expression all fit. In our "Art and Culture" section, we present two manifestations of this quest for an identity that goes beyond the mere "ethnic" or "nationalist" discourse and attempts, from a specific belonging, to reflect and make proposals in the vast world of universal values. Art critic Kathy Vargas writes about "street" painting, materialized in murals and graffiti, by two very original "Chicano street children": painters Vincent Valdez and Alex Rubio, who deal not only with the marginalization and exclusion of the Mexican population in the United States, but also with the reality of alienation, disenchantment and the dearth of opportunities for U.S. youth in general. Cultural journalist Retha Oliver presents us the trajectory of film-maker and videographer Willie Varela, widely recognized in the world of U.S. experimental cinema. The section concludes with a review of the very special sculpture and painting of Noel López, another of the huge number of visual artists from the state of Oaxaca. In our "Literature" section, we continue with the series of examples of work by Mexican-American writers. In this issue, Bruce Novoa writes about the proposal of an original current of writers who use the detective novel as a vehicle to describe today's Mexican-American communities, among them, Manuel Ramos, one of whose short stories we also publish here.

Mexico City, the immense megalopolis growing willy-nilly, today home to almost 20 million people, is also the site of many special, interesting neighborhoods, *barrios* and *colonias*, sometimes veritable towns in their own right, with their own traditions in the midst of the city. This issue's "The Splendor of Mexico" section is dedicated to three Mexico City neighborhoods, outstanding not only for their architecture and particular fascinating histories, but also because of the influence they have had in the city's urban development and for being the site of events of historical importance for the country. Mauricio Magdaleno Chapa, Agustín Jiménez and Sury Attie write about Tlatelolco, Santa María de la Ribera and San Rafael, respectively.

Lastly, in "Museums," we offer an article about a place that combines science, art and history, the Museum of Light, managed under the aegis of the National University. Here, the visitor can learn everything about the physical phenomenon of light and in addition, admire murals from the first half of the twentieth century, preserved in a building of splendid design.

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