

# OUR VOICE

Is North America still profoundly asymmetrical? Is there any intention to upgrade the trilateral association to a higher level? Does Mexico have the same possibilities as Canada of thinking about a serious relationship with the United States? To what extent is the strengthening/formalization of Mexican-Canadian relations desirable or even feasible? Are the three countries able to pursue a truly trilateral relationship that can overcome the burdens that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has established with the bilateralization of the trilateral arrangement?

The meetings between Obama and Calderon and Obama and Harper contrasted enormously. Calderón continued his crusade on the offensive; in fact, reading between the lines, he could even be termed aggressive when demanding immediate answers from Washington without a rational script as a basis. Conversely, during the second meeting, Harper talked to Obama as Americans do, independently of their personal opinions; the Canadian prime minister talked to Obama in the way Americans like the most to be approached by their neighbors and allies: proactively with a common agenda.

It should be recognized that the meeting between Calderon and Obama was a huge diplomatic achievement thanks to Tlatelolco's very good standing and work with Obama's team: meeting with the Mexican president days before the inauguration looked like the eagerly awaited opportunity to launch what could have been a fresh start for bilateral relations, and —why not?— a fresh start for a trilateral relationship that after 15 years of NAFTA has not quite come off. Apart from a crowded and almost impossible agenda, no big headlines were produced as a result. But analyzing it in retrospect, after the Obama-Harper meet, we are left with a nasty taste in our mouths because there are no signs of a change to the trilateral *status quo*. Not even in the bilateral relationship with the U.S. Wasn't Bush the problem? Weren't U.S. antiterrorist excesses the obstacle? Is the problem rooted in Mexico's limitations or the uncomfortable perception they have in the U.S. of our chaotic political process?

The conservative Canadian was able to do what the conservative Mexican could not. Harper got a public reassurance from Obama that the U.S. would not back away from its international treaty obligations. The shadows of protectionism faded slightly, and even though the "Buy American" language is still worrying the Canadian public, Obama and Harper succeeded in painting a positive picture of the bilateral relationship. That image was reinforced by the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary group that made a week-long visit to the U.S. capital to lobby for the removal of "Buy American" provisions from economic stimulus packages —now, that is proactive! The world's largest trading partners would not risk their privileged relationship. In addition, Canada suddenly became Obama's natural partner in the renewed U.S. approach to multilateral cooperation because it has the experience, the conditions and the prestige to do so. The same happened in other areas like clean energy, economic recovery and, of course, Afghanistan.

In turn, Calderón stressed U.S. responsibility regarding drug trafficking while Harper firmly told Obama that in pursuing stimulus packages only "to benefit ourselves, or to benefit ourselves, worse, at the expense of others, we will deepen the world recession, not solve it." Both articulated their concerns directly, in both cases Obama was receptive and emphatic. So, when will Mexico be able to transcend Canada, the asymmetries and history, in order to achieve its place in North America? Are we destined to remain the underdeveloped hindrance that is unprepared to embrace greater responsibilities?

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Obama's victory has undoubtedly signaled a rebirth of hope in the world for achieving more just international relations and world economic development, or at least for dealing with the current severe economic recession with greater success. This would be based on more equitable, rational ideas about international geo-politics and the United States' mission than those of his predecessor. There is also hope for Mexico that we will finally be better understood by Washington *vis-à-vis* some long-term bilateral problems like the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking, border security or migratory issues. There are many indications that President Obama and his flamboyant secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, will

have a different attitude about bilateral relations, that they will not only be more understanding but also more pro-active, willing to seek and work on joint solutions and more prepared to accept their part of the responsibility for our common problems.

In this issue, several Mexican specialists on the United States reflect about Barack Obama's victory and its consequences for Mexico. In an article I contribute myself, I put on the table just how urgent it is for both governments to deal decisively with the issue of insecurity in Mexico since a failed state south of the U.S. border, incapable of controlling organized crime, would undoubtedly be a high risk for regional security and that of the United States itself. Silvia Núñez introduces the theme of the important transformation that Obama's victory means, not only in political but also in social and even cultural terms. At the same time, however, she questions whether the U.S. electorate was politically correct when, though electing an Afro-American for the first time, it also opted for a male candidate. Leonardo Curzio contributes a valuable analysis about what he considers the Obama-Clinton duo's priorities will be in relation to Mexico. He points to several areas where opportunities exist to make bilateral relations closer and advance toward a solution of the main problems affecting both nations, as is shown, says the author, by the new administration's willingness to accept its co-responsibility for issues like drug trafficking. Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla explains how the use of new technologies, particularly the Internet, was perhaps the main political communications factor in the Democratic win, reflecting not only a generational change, but also a very hopeful change in vision for the future of North America. Finally, Elaine Levine describes the role of Latinos in Obama's victory, delving more deeply into the expectations the Hispanic population in the United States may have about the new administration and naturally taking into account the difficult economic situation that makes it hard to imagine short-term advances in immigration policy.

Two issues concern both governments the most, but perhaps in a different order of importance. While for Obama, the first issue will be finding a way out of the economic crisis, Calderón urgently needs to deal at least somewhat effectively with organized crime and to reduce the alarming levels of public insecurity. In this issue, we look at both these topics in our "Economy" and "Politics" sections. In the former, Monica Gambrill contributes an article that clearly explains the current crisis's causes and very precisely puts forward what the governments' strategies will be—particularly those of the U.S. government—to deal with it. Obama's recent measures to save the banking system by purchasing the so-called toxic assets seem to bear out her analysis. In the same section, we publish a contribution by economist Enrique Pino, who sees in this crisis signs of the end of Western financial capitalism as we know it, showing how Mexico's extreme dependence on the U.S. economy will mean that our country will be one of the hardest hit.

The rapid deterioration of Mexican public security, the unprecedented challenge of organized crime and the drug cartels to governmental institutions and power, government strategies to fight this situation and civil society's response are all dealt with in our "Politics" section. First off, Luis González Placencia argues that the Mexican federal and state government's strategy of conceiving the solution as a "war against drug trafficking" not only prevents broadening out the vision to one that would include structural solutions, but also forces them into a terrain where they have very few possibilities for success. Arturo Yáñez looks at the government's ineffective measures centered on spectacular strikes, pursuing the big drug kingpins and the best known cartels, but neglecting the undeniable phenomenon of the proliferation of small and medium-sized criminal organizations, therefore allowing them to operate with greater impunity. There is no doubt that these two pressing problems (insecurity and the crisis) will have an impact on the results of the coming elections in Mexico, in which all the seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies will change hands. The "Politics" section also includes an article by Lorenzo Córdova, who reflects on the recent electoral reforms, particularly the total control given to the Federal Electoral Institute over political party broadcast time slots, which the big media will no longer be able to charge for. This, of course, awakened the fury of the country's big media consortia, not only because of the loss of revenue involved, but above all because of the real loss of political power it means.

Globalization does not only imply sharing crises. It also presupposes that national states will increasingly try to insert themselves into international relations networks, not only to diversify trade, but also to build alliances to foster the exchange of knowledge and technologies and encourage mutual understanding. This is all indispensable in the new information societies that will be forged in the new millennium. This is why we have included in this issue a special section that we have called "Mexico and the World" to briefly assess for the first time our country's recent cultural diplomacy. Camelia Tigau and I present a review of

the academic exchange the UNAM's Center for Research on North America has established with similar institutions of higher education in Poland and Romania in the framework of the history of Mexico's cultural relations with those two nations. Louis Valentín Mballa contributes a very interesting article about Mexico's relations with the many countries of Africa, showing how establishing closer ties has been relegated because of official priorities. Even so, progress has been made, particularly in the cultural field, such as our country's declaring an official Africa Week. Bernadette Vega deals with relations with India, which Mexico has recently been able to cultivate given both countries' membership in the G-5, a group that includes the main emerging economies. This relationship is based precisely on the quest for opportunities for exchange in the field of know-how, a terrain in which India is a paradigm of development at the dawn of this century. Finally, María José Calderón examines relations with China, the giant that in many ways has imposed its development and international trade agendas in recent years. The author compares the experiences of Brazil and Chile with China: both countries have profited from that relationship, in contrast with Mexico, which for many years has resisted seeking closer ties with the Chinese. This, Calderón argues, is because of prejudice and the resentment for China's having taken its place as the world's foremost exporter to the U.S. market despite Mexico's being its neighbor and having a free trade agreement with it.

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Julio Galán is a painter who, unlike any other, combines his own internal world with the culture surrounding him. "Intimate" and "enigmatic" are probably the words that best define his work, full of surprises and symbols. We include an article by Isabel Morales about this remarkable Mexican painter in our "Art and Culture" section.

The amazing Mayan culture is undoubtedly also enigmatic. In this issue, we dedicate a significant part of our cultural sections to it. The journey starts in the Puuc region, land of very important cities like Kabá, Sayil, Labná and the spectacular Uxmal; Adriana Velasquez writes about their imposing architecture and historic importance. Leticia Vargas and Víctor Castillo lead us into the mysteries of Ek' Balam, an archaeological site famous for its majestic palace, dubbed the Acropolis, and important glyphs, which have helped advance our knowledge about the Mayan cultures thanks to their extraordinary state of preservation. The Mayan city of Dzibilchátún, as described by Rubén Maldonado, is also noteworthy for the many carved stelae found in its magnificent structures like the Temple of the Seven Dolls.

Yucatán's cultural wealth is not limited to the legacy of the ancient Mayas. What has come down to us from the colonial era is also well worth disseminating. For that reason, we include an article by Luis Millet about the magical city of Izamal, where, in addition to more vestiges of the ancient Mayan civilization, we find, built on top of them, what is probably one of the region's largest and most beautiful Catholic convents, perhaps because the Spaniards wanted to demonstrate their own ability to build monumental constructions. The nineteenth century is represented by Elsie Montiel's article about what came to be called Yucatán's "green gold," henequen. This fiber was the driving force behind the rope, twine and textile industry, the basis of the region's rapid development in the late nineteenth century, as shown by the many haciendas from that time, the source of the wealth that financed the capital city's imposing architecture. Precisely one of the most beautiful buildings from that time on Montejo Boulevard, the main avenue of Yucatán's capital, Mérida, is the Cantón Palace, today home to the Yucatán Regional Anthropology Museum, whose director, Blanca González, writes about it in our "Museum" section. And we could not leave out the splendid Yucatán cuisine, so we include an article that gives our readers a glimpse of its main ingredients.

We close this issue with an homage to one of the most prolific historians Mexican culture has ever produced, also a highly respected teacher of several generations of historians at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Historian Ana Carolina Ibarra has contributed a moving testimonial to the irreplaceable Ernesto de la Torre Villar.

*José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*