

## The Political Dimension: Making the Difference?

COOPERATION is shaped not only by international trends and forces, but also by ideologies and values. Which values inform political relations between the two regions? Can the values of peace, democracy and respect for human rights serve as the underpinnings for an inter-regional political project? The 1993 Conference on Human Rights in Vienna shows that a universal understanding of human rights and democracy is slowly emerging in the international arena. This understanding is more likely to be deepened between countries and societies that share a common cultural heritage which values pluralism and diversity such as that which unites the countries of the European Union and the Mercosul.

Both the European Union and the Mercosul pursue a model of society that values democracy, human rights, pluralism and international peace. Yet, in a context of the triumph of the market and of increasingly fierce economic competition, the societies of the European Union and the Mercosul are faced with a choice between pursuing profit and growth at all costs or pursuing a model of economic development which emphasises quality of life.

It is in the gap between the practice and the rhetoric of liberalism that what can be called *pragmatic liberalism*<sup>15</sup> is to be found: this means the implementation of economic policies which are liberal but also protect a way of life. All countries engage in pragmatic liberalism. Developing countries must be aware of the interval between rhetoric and reality, especially when they are under pressure to engage in a total liberalisation. Moreover, whatever the rhetoric of liberalism, the state has a key role to play in the practice of pragmatic liberalism. It must administer non-market sectors and ensure that competition is tempered by policies which address the social and cultural dimensions of economic development.

Democracy and human rights have been heralded as the fundamental values underpinning interregional relations. While these are very generically defined values, historical commonalities permit a more precise definition of the nature of these wide-ranging concepts in interregional relations. For Europeans and Latin Americans, social and political democracy go hand in hand: democracy is not just the formal structure of the state and of a constitution; it is equally the forces and the articulation of interests which arise from society. Both share a common vision regarding civil society as the basis for democracy. Finally, there is also a shared conception of human rights, even if levels of compliance with ideals are different. This becomes apparent when one compares Europe and Latin America to Asia, where relations between the state, individual and society are variously conceived because they have a different historical basis.<sup>16</sup>

### *Democratic Consolidation, Citizenship and Human Rights*

The European Union and the Mercosul have to work towards ensuring the "irreversibility" of democratisation and the creation of a culture of human rights. The two tasks are interlinked. Indeed, it is through the effective establishment of universal citizenship, its meaningful practice, that democracy becomes consolidated. And it is the effective practice of citizenship which ensures that human rights are respected.

The key obstacles both to democratic consolidation and respect for human rights — various structural, political and institutional bottlenecks to the process of consolidation —, have to be taken on board. Both Europe and Latin America face differing but equally problematic levels of social exclusion. As far as the Mercosul is concerned, it is important to remember the tensions and contradictions generated by the simultaneity of the process of economic liberalisation and democratisation. Neoliberal economic models have failed to deliver on the social front and have contributed to increasing poverty in Latin America. Furthermore, structural adjustment and reform have provoked differences between executive and legislative powers and led executives to rule by decree in a fashion which is not sustainable over the long term. Thus, a key task is to bring the political into the economic, or integrate the economic into the political. Although it is

necessary to analytically distinguish one realm from the other as each operates with a different time scale and in relative autonomy from the other, it is equally important not to ignore the close links between the economic development model adopted and the nature and quality of the democracy which it is capable of sustaining.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the economic dimension of democratic consolidation, it is also necessary to promote fundamental institutional and political reforms. It has become apparent that the establishment of political democracy has not led automatically to a deeper process of democratisation at the social and civic levels. Political democracy thus often co-exists with human rights violations and a culture of violence at the social level. In this context, it is the efficacious functioning of key state institutions which can foster a culture of human rights. Strong judiciaries, effective and just police and military forces are a key element for ensuring the protection of the citizens' individual rights. Impunity is a phenomenon which undermines the working and legitimacy of democratic rule.

Finally, it is important to remember the various dimensions of human rights. Civil and political rights are usually concentrated on to the detriment of other rights which require a more active intervention on the part of the state to protect parts of the population which are more vulnerable. The issue of indigenous rights is a case in point and one which is particularly relevant in Brazil and Paraguay.<sup>18</sup> The issue of minorities' rights is a case in point in Europe.

What agenda for cooperation should be established between the two regions to promote democracy and human rights at the regional and international levels? The European Union expresses its concern with democracy and human rights through a variety of instruments: the inclusion of "political conditionality" clauses in economic cooperation agreements, the financing of governmental and non-governmental projects which aim specifically to promote human rights, as well as through a "moral" or declaratory diplomacy exerted through regional institutions or within international fora. Political conditionality is very limited in its capacity to exert change. It is more adequate as an instrument to prevent authoritarian regression or to apply pressure on countries which are not democratic. In any case, it is important to keep in mind that the effectiveness of "democratic interventionism" depends largely on the degree of internal support for democracy. When societies

no longer believe in democracy as being capable of guaranteeing political representation as well as economic development, international cooperation loses its capacity to bring about positive change.

Given that the countries of the Mercosul are already democratic, political conditionality emerges in this case only as an instrument of "last resort" which is inadequate for a more positive approach needed to address the challenges of democratic consolidation. Moreover, in a context of increasing international competition, and given the inadmissibility of overt protectionism, it is necessary to ensure that human rights and social or labour rights will not be used as an excuse to increase protectionist barriers through measures against social dumping.

The approach to this issue therefore has to be positive, rather than focused on sanctions and punishment. The continued financing of pro-human rights and democracy projects is important, although these projects are not, in and of themselves, sufficient. Given that poverty and inequality is one of the greatest challenges to democratic consolidation and respect for human rights, over the long-term, the emphasis has to be on the elaboration of an interregional project which integrates political and economic development issues, promoting a new development model which is based on the concept of pragmatic liberalism and which ensures favourable terms of trade and the creation of economic development projects which emphasise social gains. Over the short and medium term, the two regions must also work to develop intermediate transitional mechanisms to deal with poverty and adjustment. It is manifestly insufficient to rely on the 'trickle down' effect. Not only has the latter proved to be less than reliable, but it does not occur over the short and medium term. It is over the short and medium term, however, that political antagonisms may emerge as a result of increased poverty.<sup>19</sup>

As far as joint action in the international sphere is concerned, the lack of a well-defined and institutionalised common foreign policy in both regions stands as a first impediment to the forging of a common agenda in the international arena. As far as the Mercosul is concerned, the recent adoption of a formal juridical commitment to democracy as well as the future elaboration of an actual Mercosul political project which is common to all member states are a first step towards the formulation of a common foreign stance with regard to the issues of democracy and human rights. In turn, the European Union must ensure a working foreign

and security policy which is compatible with trade and cooperation policy, not only to ensure coherent action but also to prevent a selectivity of approach which will undermine the credibility of the European Union's international role in promoting democracy and human rights.

When developing political as well as economic cooperation, it is important to keep the existing asymmetries of power between the two regions in mind. Each region has varying capacities to shape events in the international sphere; a successful interregional political project must therefore reflect the specific needs of both regions and the countries and societies within them.

The European Union and the Mercosul should incorporate their political action and commitments within the wider regional-institutional context, in order to permit greater coordination, avoid duplication and ensure effective action. The response to the crisis in Paraguay provides a good example of how the European Union and the Mercosul can act in unison as part of a group of "democratic interventionists". Solidarity with Paraguayan democracy was expressed by the United States, the European Union, the Mercosul and the OAS, such that internal democratic forces were bolstered by a crucial external support network.<sup>20</sup> Joint response mechanisms which include the member states of the OAS and of the European Union could be institutionalised. The strengthening of regional human rights organisations such as the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the Inter-American Court for Human Rights, as well as coordination within the human rights organisations of the United Nations constitutes a positive step towards an interregional democracy and human rights project in the regional and international spheres. One area for cooperation that emerges as immediately possible, is the forging of a commitment to promote the ratification of regional and international human rights conventions and protocols as well as to fully support the conclusions and plan of action of the Vienna Conference.<sup>21</sup>

### *International Peace and Security*

At a first glance a discussion of cooperation for peace and security between the European Union and the Mercosul may seem misplaced. The European Union does not have a well developed common foreign

and security policy; on the other hand, the countries of the Mercosul are unwilling to cooperate to establish a more coherent regional foreign policy and the Mercosul itself lacks institutions with a political mandate.

Despite these limitations, both sides have established a political dialogue and have demonstrated their interest in deepening that dialogue. It is worth remembering that the European Union has a tradition of political action in Central America for peace and security. Furthermore, the new security problems posed by a globalised society make it necessary to confront problems in a cooperative fashion. The post-Cold War international context, characterised by interdependence between nations, means that key transnational issues affect the security of all countries.

Thus, although the respective geo-political issues are quite different and institutional obstacles still exist, Latin America and Europe have an interest in defining common views on international security. Closer cooperation will increase both regions' capacity to influence international politics. Furthermore, both Europe and Latin America have an interest in preventing the emergence of either a unipolar world dominated by the United States or of an anarchic multipolar world where there are no entities responsible for common security.

The reform of the Security Council of the United Nations, participation in peacekeeping missions and conflict prevention are key areas for coordinated action. Non-proliferation, drug trafficking and money laundering, environmental threats as well as terrorism are common concerns and elements for an interregional agenda.

The security dialogue should be wide ranging in terms of actors. The creation of a permanent forum for debate should be contemplated, including not only official military and civilian government personnel, but also elements from civil society. Jurists should be involved to define the legal bases for the new cooperative security. Relevant non-governmental organisations should also participate both to provide information and to represent the different preoccupations and alternative visions of civil society.<sup>22</sup>

The European Union and the Mercosul need to take the United States into account when elaborating a political project. The attitude of the United States to the European Union as a partner in the international arena and as an economic competitor is of key importance.

All three have an interest in the stability and coherence of the other as a partner and international actor. The disintegration of the European project would be negative not only for Europe, but also for the United States which needs Europe in a new unstable global order. The support of the United States for democratic transition in Latin America has been very important but it is also true that with the decline of Cold War security threats and a concomitant decrease in strategic importance, Latin America has gained a new autonomy vis-à-vis the United States in the international arena.

The basis for the traditional pattern of "triangular" relations is therefore shifting, and it is important to forge a new basis for relations which recognises the accrued benefits of political coordination between these regional actors. A key task is to bring the United States into a dialogue from which it is currently distanced given competing domestic concerns and an overwhelming focus on Central America and its NAFTA partner, Mexico.

Although the United States currently views the establishment of a political dialogue between Europe and Latin America with some scepticism, it is necessary that all interested parts participate in the definition of the principles of a collective security. Closer cooperation in the field of security and peace between Latin America and the European Union would close the "triangle" and permit a more solid discussion of solutions to security issues which affect all three. The European Union and the Mercosul could undertake to coordinate their action through an "Atlantic Conference" based on their shared universalist, multicultural political model, which could be widened to include the United States.

Latin America, Europe and the United States, which share a common cultural heritage, could constitute an "Atlantic link" based on the values of democracy, human rights, as well as individual, political, economic and cultural freedom. Effective cooperation between the three parts could contribute to future international stability. However, before this will be possible, the European integration process has to be strengthened politically and the Mercosul needs to be consolidated.<sup>23</sup>