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The Ibero-American Conference: Prospects for Future Development¹

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Background

The evolution of the Ibero-American summit process presents itself as a fascinating phenomenon to be observed from a variety of angles. From its inception, it was rightly perceived as a naturally expected **mission of foreign policy** inspired by Spain for its modern reinsertion in Latin America. It was also justified with a reasonable dose of historical obligation, if not vision, to strengthen the country's Latin American historical. Taking advantage of the suitable historical circumstances, it was strategically timed to coincide with the commemoration of the Quincentenary of Christopher Columbus' travel in **1492** and the ultimate appointment of Spain (and Portugal) with destiny.

In amicable and rather guarded terms, it was also perceived as the first political and cultural step toward a Reconquista of Latin America. This time the agenda was going to be accompanied by an economic strategy based on aggressive investments in key sectors, some of them opening up to the world market through a process of privatization. The project since then has attracted the attention of analysts and has captured in different stages the energy of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Its development has also filled considerable media space with anecdotal details that seem to be far away from the traditional foundational purposes.

Hidden by a peripheral debate anchored around personal actions and single annual events is the crucial subject of the need to define the nature of the Ibero-American process and resulting lasting entity. Since its announcement, it has eluded proper classification in the ever-changing panorama

of inter-state relations. This rather academic angle is nonetheless badly needed if observers really wish to tackle with a minimum amount of success the analysis of its potential to compete in the world area, or at least in the inter-American setting. How this project comparatively related to, for example, to the EU-Latin America-Caribbean summits, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), or even to the Organization of American States? A central question remains: **what is the Ibero-American process**, system, Community, or project? Just the variety of names given to the entity officially born in 1991 should be a clear sign of indecision and ambivalence. But that undefined sense of identity has happened before with many of the experiments in inter-state relations set in motion since the end of World War II.

A series of constant contradictory signals have emanated from its summits and periodic declarations. For example, while official statements coincide with standard interpretations given by analysts, the Ibero-American system never officially aimed at having the structure of a standard **international organization**. However, it has frequently perplexed scholars when the entity in the making has taken some steps that show its intention to behave with distinct personality. For example, it has mirrored other cultural and linguistic frameworks (Commonwealth, Francophonie, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries). In addition, like them, it has been admitted as an observer in the United Nations. In addition, what appeared to be at its birth a close club with a roster dictated by history, has recently added the tiny *Principat* of Andorra as a new member.

Geographically, the foundation of the Ibero-American process has to take into account the pre-existence of an elaborate inter-American system with a long history and in constant state

of realignment. The Ibero-American format has tried not to give the impression of duplication, competition, or interference with the Organization of American States and any of the inter-American organizations and entities that included all or most of the Western Hemisphere countries. At the same time, declarations have made the effort of offering the Ibero-American project as complementary for the Latin American frameworks.

In a microcontext, the planned institutionalization of the project with the setting in place of a permanent **General Secretariat** deserves a more in-depth analysis using innovative concepts and tools, not limited to the standard framework employed for studying international organizations, strictly trade-oriented links, or political alliances. In sum, the Ibero-American process defies classification. Still, scholars and casual observers need to offer an evaluation for its potential to meet its vaguely stated foundational purposes and obtain the recently set goals through its innovative institutionalized structure.

To begin with, observers must ponder an apparent contradiction regarding the timing of its foundation. The Ibero-American project was set in motion precisely when **Spain and Portugal** had consolidated their position in the European integration setting, as full members of what then was called the European Community, ready to become the **European Union**. Their membership in the European adventure founded in 1950 was a priority not to be surpassed in priority level by any other linkage with any other region in the world. The insertion of Portugal and Spain, the two Iberian countries in the European Community meant to be a contribution to an unusual enterprise. Historical records and rigorous analysis have shown that this is the most ambitious

and successful experiment of European integration ever attempted and executed through pacific means, not by force or annexation. For the two former sea world powers with an indelible imprint in the Americas, this was a fitting coming home.

Paradoxically, both states (with Spain at the helm, must be understood) then implicated themselves in an intercontinental project across the Atlantic. This move appeared to be a distraction from their central Old World agenda of full reinsertion in the nucleus from which they were banned for decades because of the nature of their respective dictatorial regimes. The least one is tempted to say is that the Ibero-American move was apparently an unnecessary example of overstretching for the two countries that entered the EC as net recipients of aid. They were in need of behaving properly and concentrating on having their homework done on time and efficiently. Portugal could claim then that it was a member of other European economic frameworks and a founder of NATO. In turn, Spain managed to lessen its initial isolation after the Civil War by inserting itself in the military network led by the United States during the height of the Cold War. But the fact was that the crown jewel sought by Madrid and Lisbon was to have full seats in Brussels. In fact, Spain's rise to international activity attracted the attention of scholars world-wide, using the domestic political evolution as a model for transitions and its new influential foreign policy as a stark contrast to traditional isolation.

Oddly, just when the Ibero-American project began its journey towards a sort of unknown destination with an eye set on the rear view mirror of history, the new European Community was re-baptized as the European Union by the **Treaty of Maastricht** ratified in 1992. It was another decisive European "bold step" according to the original script of the **Schuman** Declaration issued on May 9, 1950,

following the script by Jean **Monnet**, aiming at a “closer union”. At the same time, after fulfilling the mandate of the **Single European Act** of 1986 that set the completion of the Common market, the new EU decided on the adoption of the euro as a common currency.

By coincidence, fate or design, the year 1992 fused a historical commemoration skillfully chosen by Spain with an ambitious EU chapter. The same argument could be raised regarding the EU timing. However, comparing the resources given to both projects, the EU showed an advantage. Analysts then pondered if the Spanish initiative would survive the event-centered opportunity, lacking the impressive financial resources that the re-launching of the European adventure enjoyed. Among them many differences between the EU and other international organizations and alliances is that the European framework has a well-financed budget run by independent institutions.

Historians and political analysts rightly have pointed out that the European-wide integration process has been based since its beginning on a volunteer consensus agreed upon by states that had been at war since times immemorial. Their inexorable path towards self-destruction was recognized as caused by the perverse hyper obsession on national sovereignty stressing parochial differences in history, languages and social structures. Worse, a messianic sense of racial and ethnic superiority led to tragedy and holocaust. Hence, the self-imposed pooling of sovereignty was implemented step by step through the functionalist method, while respecting national peculiarities and characteristics. It was the negative aspects of European history that were not to be repeated at any cost. The future of a will to belong to a cooperative,

pragmatic project using economic means was the focus of an inclusive, self-contained sense of identity.

The Nature of the Creature

Although it was a Spanish idea to have the first foundational summit held in Spain, pragmatism and vision exercised by the Spanish government led by Felipe González and King **Juan Carlos I** grabbed the occasion of presenting it to the Mexican government. Mexican authorities then were yearning to expand their international stardom when the country was just coming out of an authoritarian, one party system. They were also looking for ways to balance the upcoming dependency of the United States through the assembly of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA). The first summit was then held in Guadalajara, Mexico, as a sort of preparation for the impressive setting staged by the commemoration of the Quincentenary of the Discovery of America by Columbus in 1992.

Looking backwards, the new experiment needed not to repeat the mistakes of bygone eras. Symbolic of the new approach was the more inclusive label of “Ibero-America” that aimed to fuse limited expressions such as Latin America, in which Spain and Portugal could not fit, sidestepping imperial, traditional Spanish-led concepts such as Hispanidad. Although Portugal has never been at ease with the concept of “Iberia” that it claims to be Spain-dominated, the global approach caught the space reserved and became the standard expression used in the official literature of Spain to refer to Latin America as an entity at the other side of the Atlantic, and also of the inclusive group incorporating Spain and Portugal. By using this label, the Spanish government also intended to neutralize the universally accepted tag of Latin America, historically an invention of France to reinforce

its presence in a continent in transition since the demise of the Spanish empire.

It was the Spanish government that carried the brunt of the responsibility and covered the expenses of the inaugural efforts. This was also going to become the routine in the following decade. It was an obligatory gesture of noblesse oblige that ultimately endangered the process, tinged by Spanish dependency. The whole terminological and conceptual framework got inserted into the perennial polemic over the appropriateness of the different levels to describe diverse lineups of the Latin American nations. While **Pan-Americanism** has usually described a format to which the United States belongs and traditionally has dominated, **Monroism** has been employed as a critical weapon to decry U.S. hegemony. **Indo-America**, a label invested by Perú's Haya de la Torre, has not caught in the whole continent, while **Hispanidad** and **Hispanoamericanismo** has been countered as leaning towards the dependency on Spain. Hence the convenience of the all-inclusive term Ibero-America.

With this and other thoughts in mind, the wider context in which the new enterprise was inserted was composed, as far as Spain is concerned (and to a considerable extent, Portugal, too), of the incorporation of the Spanish democracy in different adventures of regional integration, peace-making and peace-keeping plans, and a multitude of international organizations and alliances. All this was happening just a decade after Spain and the Vatican were the only European states that did not belong to any major international alliance or network with the exception of the United Nations. This new fever of joining was humorously described as a geo-political variance of the "apuntarse a todo" syndrome (signing up for anything).

In any event, two key factors that needed to be fused for the success of the operation were to become the twin jewels of the crown for this occasion. This cliché is justified in the context of the 30th anniversary of King Juan Carlos' accession to the Spanish throne and was the excuse for the celebration of the XVth summit in Salamanca.

One factor was the permanent installation of Spain in the European Community (EC) that was becoming the European Union (EU), effective since its accession along with Portugal in 1986. The second was the undisputed Ibero-American vocation of Spain, a centerpiece of the official discourse that no Spanish government or regime can afford to sidestep. Many observers are perplexed by the fact that Spain's national holiday (although questioned in some quarters or regions) is not a call for independence, a famous battle, or the monarch's birthday. It is celebrated on October 12th, the day Columbus arrived in 1492 on the tiny island of Guanahani, named San Salvador, in today's Bahamas. Language expansion and migration of millions of Spaniards to Latin America have provided the glue of what is called "a special relationship" with deep family connotations.

Covered by this historical background, the new Spanish impulse received its decisive (and hopefully final) endorsement in 1992 with a three-fold agenda formed by the celebration of the **500th anniversary** of Columbus' feat with the organization of a world exhibit in Seville, the **Olympic Games** held in Barcelona, and the award of **European Cultural Capital** to be bestowed on the city of Madrid. However, this impressive, spectacular start began to fade away with inertia in the second part of the 90s. The Salamanca summit has attempted to address the fact that the energy employed during the first stage barely had survived in the new century.

In this setting, the peculiarity of the project significantly known in its inception in Spanish political and scholarly circles as the “**Ibero-American Community of Nations**” resides on the fact that it was not supposed to be a variant of a “civic nation of nations”. This was actually the foundational message of the European Union, fearful of intolerant nationalism, producing fights among neighbors, with tragic consequences of universal impact. Instead, the Ibero-American project presented itself as a sort of “cultural supnation”, spanning two continents. From Santiago de Chile to Oporto, from Seville to Montevideo, from Bahía to Ciudad Real, from Bogotá to La Paz, history and cultural legacy were to be the center of cohesion and sole bonding of this new experiment. The new project did not have as an objective the seeking of development funds, gathering of economic resources, aiming at lowering trade barriers, or sharing military might as a protection facing common enemies. The pooling of history and culture was apparently the only aim.

Curiously enough, from the start, the main attractiveness of the process and its major weapon was composed of the obvious counterpoint presented by the Ibero-American proposal in a world that since the end of the Cold War has been under the threatening force of globalization that looks with disdain on identity and the intimacy of national societies. Against a world-wide trend, the Ibero-American “community” seemed to be waiving a flag showing a sense of a primordial identity, original belonging, simply justified by an accepted historical colonial bonding past and two similar and mostly mutually intelligible languages (Spanish and Portuguese) coming from a common root. In fact, with no other explicit membership requirements, such as military purposes (as in NATO), geographical

constraints (to be in Europe, in the EU) or economic indicators (deficit ceilings, inflation, etc.), the Ibero-American entity makes the point of mentioning in very clear terms the only condition for inclusion: Portuguese or Spanish as languages. The foundational Declaration of the I Summit held in Guadalajara, México, says that the heads of state and government have decided to found the Ibero-American Conference “with the participation of the sovereign States of America and Europe of Spanish and Portuguese language”. Successive declarations simply repeat the listing of the member countries adding this sole sign of identity: Spanish and Portuguese.

However, the linguistic clause is limited to American and European countries with the result of the exclusion of other countries that have neither Spanish nor Portuguese as official, majority, or minority languages. For example, former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Africa do not belong. But Andorra, with only Catalan as an official language, is a new member in recognition of the wide use of Spanish. Effective membership was agreed on the principle that the roster of languages in the Ibero-American group would not be expanded and that the Pyrenees country would be represented by its executive elected government and not by the co-sovereigns, the President of France and the Bishop of the neighbor Catalan town of La Seu d’Urgell.

This linguistic requirement and unique link left open for speculation and frequent commentaries the fact that between 30 and 50 million (depending on what the criteria is) of Hispanics live in the United States, making this country the second or third most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, in addition to the special status of Puerto Rico. Membership or observer status have been contemplated and discussed in political and media circles, but the original roster has been maintained. Ironically, this steady policy of

keeping the distance with the Hispanic presence in the United States is contradictory with the alarming claim espoused by some U.S. commentators against an “invasion” of Spanish speakers in what has been considered as a basically Anglo-Protestant entity.

In any event, the international nature of the scheme presented a challenge for its operability. This is an obstacle that apparently did not seem to bother the Ibero-American “founding fathers”, a condition that was open to whoever could claim it, with patrician satisfaction of the Spanish leaders, the original inventors of the creature. They (Latin American and Iberian) were satisfied by the apparent self-evident sustainability of the project crafted by previously existent and unquestionable solid bonds.

The historically certified existence of the new entity was supposed to be as rock-solid as the right to be that nation-states of ethnic, cultural, “German” variance customarily claim. Belonging to “Ibero-America” was a sort of a medal bestowed by history. It was not created by self-described will, endorsed by fulfilling meeting entrance requirements. The Ibero-American “family” was self-inclusive –you did not have a choice regarding membership. The most a state could do is to decline the initial invitation. The record shows that none refused the call. None has since expressed a desired to leave. How could they have done otherwise? This specificity deserves an explanation that is apparently very simple. The group has existed before its formal foundation. The Ibero-American project was a family that simply needed to be registered. In comparative terms, it was a *de facto* family, or common law union that deserved to be legalized.

While the concept of “family” varies with civilizations, it is well understood among the Ibero-American societies that the “**extended family**” is comprised of at least three generations and it includes cousins. While there are fights in all families, extended or reduced, a sort of secret pact precluded any of the existing Ibero-American states from resisting attendance in the first “reunions” (to use the Anglo-American term) that the summits seemed to be. To guarantee maximum attendance, the organizers (Spain leading) went to extremes not to set membership requirements beyond the conditioning presented by historical linkages. This meant that highly developed countries and less fortunate developing ones would sit at the same table, while governments just coming out of dictatorships or in danger of reverting to this condition would also dialogue with impeccable democracies.

The Ibero-American group also presents a distinction with other alliances formed by former empires and their now independent colonies. In contrast with the British and French colonial structures that have recently disappeared, the Spanish and Portuguese date back their demise to a period between one and two centuries. Loyalty and need for protection is therefore different in the Commonwealth and even in the initial setting of the ACP group composed mostly of former French colonies than in the case of Latin American links with the Iberian states.

In a similar comparative context, one can easily note that the Ibero-American process contrasts with membership conditions presented by the EU. These (economic and political) are self-evident since the foundation, and have been reinforced by the Copenhagen criteria. Strict requirements do not allow the compromise of wishy-washy pragmatic deals such as it has customary been in NATO, where military-controlled regimes (Greece, Turkey) have

accompanied founding members such as Portugal, ruled by the Oliveira Salazar dictatorship. At the Ibero-American table explicit dictatorial regimes such as Cuba, barely leaving the alliance with the Soviet Union, were to sit with equal rights along clean, EU label-certified, and transition model democracies for academic worldwide analysis as Portugal and Spain. These two Iberian countries were to be in the company of Latin American standing points of reference such as Costa Rica, along states that were to change governments by a variety of unorthodox means not always governed by the ballots (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Argentina). At the same time, Mexico, an important member in any Latin American lineup, just was just coming out of a one-party system reigning for six decades, was invited to hold the first summit in 1991.

In other words, while in the EU bloc a new member is pressed to present a dossier that includes a good democratic and economic conduct certificate, it is also an accepted understanding that the cultural, linguistic, historical, and customs peculiarities are so ample that it is assumed that the innate nature of Europe is its diversity in interpreting a basic common legacy shared in strikingly different degrees. This belonging to a political community that was bound by economic tools with clear cut rules contrasts with the Ibero-American Community in which one enters (in fact, one belongs since centuries ago) by cultural affinity, in which political and even economic differences are strictly respected. For this and other reasons, observers (in Spain and elsewhere) have dealt with this experiment with a mixture of skepticism, questioning its effective potential as an entity that competes in the already crowded world of international organizations and coalitions of all sorts.

Remodeling the Premises

In any event, since its foundation (or its re-foundation, if one considers that the Ibero-American Community has existed for centuries) in 1991, much has happened in this family. In October 2005 in **Salamanca** a new chapter was opened towards a crucial stage that should be the key for the success or failure of the cycle inaugurated in **Guadalajara**, Mexico. Media records and other literature distinctively show that at the time the label floated by the official discourse emanating from Madrid was the “Community of Ibero-American Nations”. This is an impressive and ambitious concept that has been inexorably demoted from the official declarations, only to be used figuratively referring to the overall historically-link group, and with certain stylistic rhetoric. Coinciding with the crafting of the “European Economic Space”, the pre-enlargement of the EU that was to convert it from an entity of 12 to 25 in 2004, the expression “Ibero-American Space:” began to be used in official literature, permeating the scholarly analysis. Then the word “Conference” was also used to describe the different configurations of ministerial gatherings and other gatherings. Finally the rather mundane and abused term “summit” captured the official public seal, although it only legally describes the annual high meeting of the presidents of Latin America, Spain and Portugal (with these two countries doubly represented by the heads of state and government).

In sum, what is popularly known as the “Ibero-American Summit” is just an annual meeting of heads of state and government, lasting only two days. What remains afterwards when everyone goes home is the Ibero-American Conference, structured in the summit itself, the meetings of ministers of Foreign Affairs, the national coordinators of each country, and the administrators of development aid programs. The "armed branch" is then the Ibero-American

General Secretariat (SEGIB). Consequently, the Conference is a structure that works for the service of the Ibero-American Community, composed of 19 Latin American countries, and the three European states (Spain, Portugal and Andorra). For lack of a comprehensive treaty, experts have suggested that the Ibero-American system has been composed of two “high level structures” (the summits of the Heads of States and Government, and the meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs), three “continuity” structures (Pro Tempore Secretariat, Troika, Extended Troika), “management structures” (national coordinators, cooperation officers, joint meetings), “permanent organs” (the Ibero-American Cooperation Secretariat to be succeeded by the Ibero-American General Secretariat) and “Conference Forums” (ministerial meetings, cooperation programs).

In this context, the moment of truth had arrived with the preparations of the summit to be held in the emblematic Castilian town of Salamanca on October 14-15, 2005. Taking into account that the event would also serve as a fitting scenario for the inauguration of the institutionalization process with the addition of the General Secretariat with its site located in Madrid, the Spanish government had much at stake and was not going to leave any stone unturned. The naming of the first **Secretary General** was the culmination of a mandate that was initiated in the XII Summit held in Bávaro, Dominican Republic, in 2002 by entrusting a report to a **Commission** presided by former Brazilian president and scholar **Fernando Henrique Cardoso**. The mission was to study the process and the feasibility of its improvement and wider international presence. The Cardoso report had as its main terms of reference to consult with a group of experts and to present its

conclusions in the following XIII Summit to be held in Bolivia in 2004. The conclusions included as main recommendations the institutionalization of the existing “system of conferences”, to elevate the status of the existing Ibero-American Secretariat of Cooperation (SECIB) to the rank of Ibero-American Permanent Secretariat (SEGIB), to study the necessary mechanisms and processes to make Ibero-American cooperation more effective, and to study the petitions of new memberships. In Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, the General Secretariat was approved, leading to the approval of its statute in the XIV Summit held in Costa Rica in 2004. The path was open towards a more ambitious chapter of the process, with considerable challenges.

That was not an easy task for the new Spanish government elected after the March 14th, 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid. The new Spanish administration led by **José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero** has inherited a project (especially the creation of the Permanent Secretariat) that was the result of a u-turn strategy executed after 2002 by the Spanish Prime Minister **José María Aznar**, electing to make unilateral initiatives in the summit process. Moreover, the striking, controversial and fractuous behavior of the Spanish president in the course of the summits resulting in encounters with some of his colleagues was worsened by the alliance formed with President Bush over the war in Iraq. This Atlantic dimension suffered a spillover effect when some members (Chile and Mexico) of the Ibero-American family were publicly lobbied by Aznar to endorse the U.S.-UK attitude in the Security Council, of which Spain was then a non-permanent member. The Ibero-American bloc was further split by the assembly of a military brigade named Plus Ultra to participate in the occupation of Iraq with troops of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic partially equipped and trained by Spanish command. The perception that Spain defended U.S.

interests in the Ibero-American setting worsened its fragile status. Meanwhile, Spain's role in the core of the EU got in trouble by its becoming a leader in blocking measures and unnecessarily delaying the constitutional consensual process.

In this setting, the new Spanish government inherited a dilemma. On one hand, the installation of the General Secretariat, the pivotal project of the Ibero-American process, was planned according to the unilateral pattern exercised by Aznar, but it was implemented with certain professionalism and a dose of lack of inclusiveness by Cardoso that still raised concerns in many Latin American quarters. On the other hand, the need for the institutionalization of the process was unavoidable. The essence of the project was unquestionable. Rodríguez Zapatero could not afford risk of appearing as the cause of the derailment of an enterprise that had been considered as a matter of state. The setting of the previous summit held in Costa Rica had caught the new Spanish administration under a deluge of pending business while addressing the priority of damage control in the more important context of the European Union. Consequently, the scheduled Salamanca summit had to be addressed with unusual professionalism, political energy and resources.

As first step, a special meeting of ministers of foreign affairs held in Guimaraes, Portugal, in May 2005, agreed on the appointment of the new first Secretary General. Another ministerial meeting held in September 2005 New York during the UN General Assembly annual gathering appointed **Enrique Iglesias**, a prestigious Uruguayan official of Spanish birth, as first Secretary General. After seventeen years of leading the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the appointment of Iglesias

became without doubt the most important development of the Ibero-American adventure. Simultaneously, Brazil's **Maria Elisa Brerenguer** was named as Deputy Secretary General and Mexico's **Miguel Hakim** as Secretary for Cooperation. Iglesias is also backed by a cabinet of experienced professionals led by Nicaraguan **Edmundo Jarquín**. A staff of about 30 professionals is currently working, or in process of appointments, in the headquarters located in Madrid and funded by a budget of over \$ 5 million.

During the months preceding the summit, several high-profile officials canvassed the Latin American capitals taking tally of each and all of the presidents committed to attend the Salamanca gathering. Vice President **María Teresa Fernández de la Vega** (who presided the Commission to oversee the preparations of the summit) visited several key Latin American capitals in key sub regions and conducted personal interviews with presidents to guarantee the promise of a full house for the summit. However, final attendance had some casualties, most of them justified for natural disasters emergencies affecting Central America (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala) and political crisis looming over Ecuador. The final no-show of **Fidel Castro** was in a way a blessing in disguise, because it relieved the organizers from the pressure to stand customary demonstrations against him and the expected protagonist role to take. However, the pattern of absences in previous summits confirmed that in the calculations of the Cuban leader, the risks of confrontation and demands of extradition presented in Spanish courts did not match the expected advantages.

Balance and Prospects

In spite of the bad omens dictated by the inertia of the past, this new stage has started on a moderately impressive good step, highlighted by the appointment of Enrique Iglesias as first permanent Secretary General. A consensus of observers keenly points out that his personal prestige and impeccable credentials are such that he cannot afford a failure and institutional loss for his backers, which include King Juan Carlos himself. However, the record inherited by him is rather ambivalent and riddled by contradiction and enigmas that only time will clarify.

As outlined above, just the oscillation of the original name of Ibero-American Community to land on the rather modest “summit” is an emblematic symbol of what had happened to the pioneer idea. What for some of the designers was to be a replica of the British Commonwealth and the Francophonie, enhanced with a true multilateral protagonist role at both sides of the Atlantic, centered around historical and cultural values fully shared by all the members, was en route kidnapped by personal vanities, erratic interpretations, and the selection of a vague agenda that seems to be impractical, at times utopian, and repetitive with other regional schemes. Since its foundation, what has been called “summitry” (“cumbritis” in a more sarcastic Spanish) as part of an innovative jargon to describe new forms of inter-state relations after the end of the Cold War, was enthroned to preside the Ibero-American process. It appeared that in Iberia and Latin America a consensus was built to resist at all cost the putting in place of a minimum structure that would serve as a base to implement and follow up agreements made in the late hours of the annual gatherings. Ministers and civil societies were left out of

the process, depending on the wishes of the top officials, backed by national sovereignty and the obligation to reach a consensus under the threat of a veto.

Meanwhile, this pattern was going to compete with a proliferation of similar summits to be held in the Americas either at the wide continental level or at the more modest sub-regional setting. This inter-American fever matched a worldwide trend making the agenda of presidents and prime ministers virtually impossible. The Ibero-American summits, refusing to meet at intervals longer than the annual gatherings because small countries feared to lose the chance to preside and play hosts, then primed provisionality over substance and systematizing. Bold national challenges and public personal postures transformed diplomatic negotiations and consensus building into sorry confrontations. The use and abuse of particular agendas from the outside of the country for domestic purposes and media attraction demoted the common destiny and legacy to unknown depths. Then, sane leaders (if not the King of Spain himself) had to rush behind the scenes to craft a minimum common denominator to salvage what remained of the collective cohesiveness. With very little substance to show as a final record, some individual cameo appearances captured the media limelight. Too often, some specific leaders (one Spanish and one Cuban) distinguished themselves in manipulating the nature of the summit to channel domestic strategies with ambitious international outreach.

Former Spanish premier Aznar, under whose double mandate (1996-2004), in a more acute fashion since 2002, the Ibero-American concept and in general Spanish-Latin American relations were damaged, is as guilty as Fidel Castro in derailing the Ibero-American process. The Cuban president for life, went from acting as a very uncomfortable prima donna of the

annual “show” to opt for absence in recent years, a trend confirmed by skipping Salamanca. He saw that he was not obtaining the results expected and he could not stand demonstrations against his regime. As a consequence, he made the performance of his security services unbearable for the hosts and the summits in general, especially when they were held in sites with a minimum of openness and in countries run by governments considered neutral or critical of the Cuban regime.

In any event, it was obvious that the lightly-set Ibero-American process was not to be allowed to become the proper setting to send bold challenges of a duel-like nature with very little chances of obtaining the results sought. Challenging an adversary with a chess-like move had many spectacular and headlines grabbing consequences but not the final objective of forcing a dictatorial regime to change course. “Mover ficha” has become a standard in the Spanish political vocabulary since Aznar challenged Castro in Viña del Mar, Chile, to reform his system if expecting to receive European aid and understanding. But this only resulted in strengthening the intolerance of the Cuban policies and producing personal insults. Moreover, the summit may be not the best setting for extracting impractical declarations such as branding the United States as guilty of international terrorism. Reasonable logic and a dose of pragmatic attitude recommend a return to the legitimate and original agenda of cultural integration. Upon this base, the process can address some pressing items such as poverty reduction and eradication of social exclusion.

Most observers in Latin America (and in Spain, too) agree that Enrique Iglesias has a golden opportunity within his reach to culminate his brilliant career. To this end, he

would have to enjoy the blessing and active cooperation (as it they were citizens of a “civic nation”) of his superiors in this enterprise, the key leaders of the Ibero-American group. The problem is that one can expect a state consensus in Spain regarding the Ibero-American project than can be rebuilt with at least a not very confrontational attitude of the Partido Popular. However, this dimension of foreign policy that was the subject of a national consensus between the two main political formations has been recently shattered after the defeat of the PP in the March 2004 elections. While political confrontations in Latin America and Portugal over the Ibero-American project are not the norm, inertia and lukewarm enthusiasm that disappear after the summits are the main negative obstacles.

All this simply means that a clear-cut consensus to be crafted between Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and half a dozen of his influential counterparts will have to wait until new presidents coming out of the new elections to be held in 2006 have a solid hold of their offices. Uncertainties of the elections results make this scenario a tricky one, to say the least. Moreover, the prospects of a deepening in the leftist profile of some of the new presidents make the cooperation of the moderates and conservatives leaders even more problematic.

In the meanwhile, some positive signals are to be taken into consideration. They may greatly contribute to the final success of the operation of the reborn “Community” (a label that deserves to be unearthed and brought to the forefront). They also are key factors for the basic cohesion that still exists among the countries that share the Spanish and Portuguese languages.

A mild correction in the ambivalent Portuguese attitude towards the process has been detected. **Portugal** has been aware of its limited capacity

in Latin America (even in Brazil). Since the times of the political transition and most especially since the moment that along with Spain, Portugal became a member of the European Union, Lisbon has been very careful not to increase the dependency on Spanish investment and the overpowering presence of the big neighbor. Respectful and willing to appear cooperative, Portuguese leaders appeared to accept the Ibero-American project with unpretentious enthusiasm without showing any resistance. Priming its European presence and the advantageous alliance with the United States, Africa had taken precedence over Latin America. Portugal is not a point of reference in Brazil, or at least not in the way as Spain is in most of Latin America. But then Portugal has to take for granted the existence of an “Ibero-American cultural nation”, but it still needs to register that it is in its interest to belong to a “civil Ibero-American bloc” that delivers benefits.

On a personal level, relations between socialist Felipe González were cordial and fruitful with all of his counterparts in Lisbon. José María Aznar enjoyed a warm personal relationship with Portuguese socialist Prime Minister Antonio Guterres and later continued the pattern with conservative José Manuel Barroso. The current coincidence of Social-Democratic administrations in Spain and Portugal should make the Spanish-Portuguese tandem a fruitful alliance. Subsequently, Rodríguez Zapatero offered Portuguese premier José Sócrates to share the responsibility of acting as engines of the new General Secretariat, beginning with a joint presidency of the summit, to take place in Salamanca, very close to the border.

Reinforcing the cultural links that make the backbone of the project, the decision taken by Brazil to make the Spanish language

compulsory in the schools has presented a challenge to Spain to provide part of the necessary teaching resources. This move will also constitute an incentive for the neighbors to learn Portuguese, a pending matter that is also evident in Spain regarding the poor command of Portuguese shown by Spaniards.

Another timely advantage is that all this is happening while Spain has been promoting the project for an “Alliance of Civilizations”, an idea originally presented by Spain’s Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero at the United Nations General Assembly last fall. It was endorsed by Secretary General Kofi Annan, and was backed by the government of Turkey, co-presiding the initiative with Spain. The Ibero-American Community is an alliance formed by countries born as a result of a bloody clash of civilizations emanating from 1492. Spain and Portugal themselves are among the most mixed communities in the world, the product of invasions, migrations, internal wars and racial cleansing and interacting, some of the trends that were exported to the Americas by conquistadors and emigrants. Ibero-America has now a unique opportunity to act in unison in an atmosphere of diversity.

Meanwhile, the United States, an unavoidable partner in the continent where most of the urgent actions of the Ibero-American community are to be implemented, is facing troubles of leadership regarding the adventure of the war and occupation of Iraq, and the fight against terrorism. Having the Ibero-American group on board in a common program of social development and economic progress, may give Washington a needed respite and an opportunity to accept the loyalty of the Iberian members. Alliances with traditional allies are a much better policy than ad-hoc deals with adversaries.

However, the most impressive asset that the Ibero-American system has within its year to

become a success is the double added value provided by what is called in contemporary terms the “civil society” and a new aggressive presence of Spanish business interest implanted in Latin America. Used and abused by rhetoric, the human dimension linking Iberia and Latin America is the lasting legacy not of the colonial official control, but generated by anonymous migration. Experts have called this special dimension linking Spain (and Portugal) and Latin America a “subterranean” relationship. There is not a region of Spain, nor a family that does not have a recent or distant experience of a family member migrating to one Latin American country, forced by hunger, lack of opportunities, political repression and exile. This makes the Spanish experience of America not a foreign adventure but a feeling of being “at home”.

This sense of belonging and of making normally risky operations a natural bet that deserves to be tested is what is behind, besides objective financial and economic records, the spectacular landing of Spanish investment in Latin America in the 90s, still going in force today. Memory, customs and language are not enough arguments to justify important trade and investment operations, but they help in endorsing business calculations and financial prospects.

How this investment dimension might be inserted in the framework of the Ibero-American summits is open to speculation. What has been until now a bilateral strategy led by some key sectors of the Spanish economy has the potential of receiving considerable reinforcement especially is some of the policies and programs to be implemented under the umbrella of the Ibero-American system receive substantial attention and resources. For example, the plan to barter debt for educational programs

may propel the impressive cultural industry of Spain to make an aggressive move in Latin America where it already enjoys an advantageous base.

In any event, no matter what is the overall strategy, Spanish interests are not free from any of the threats and challenges current looming over the Latin American landscape and the overall inter-American scene. Let’s keep in mind that Spanish investment has been the target of double harassment emanating from U.S. and Latin American sources. Competition in a region that until very recently has been considered as a monopoly of U.S. companies has not received any sign of welcome. Spanish aggressive operations in the field of communications, banking and energy have caught U.S. interests flatfooted. Moreover, in Latin America, Spanish presence has been identified first with conquistadors, missionaries, and colonial administrators. After independence, immigrants, political refugees, and religious representatives traditionally represented Spain. They were, respectively, filling some needed spots in the society, without constituting a threat to the system that just a few (some leftist individuals and practitioners of the Theology of Liberation) dare to confront.

Then, all of a sudden, waiters and corner bodegueros were substituted by financial and energy officials who dressed in pinstriped suits and carry attaches full of contracts and cell phones with worldwide reach. That was news. The fact that some of the businesses were in high level profile of communications and commodities touching the daily lives of millions of Latin Americans produced a sort of resentment in the eyes of nationalistic observers who observed with alarm the passing of privatized industry to the new conquistadors. It remains to be seen if the current wave of populism will find a suitable prey in this sector. It also remains open for future analysis if the

arrogant Spaniard has substituted the old-fashioned ugly American.

In any event, Latin American leaders could grab the opportunity to take the initiative and use this Ibero-American platform as an alternative, complementary setting to include the EU agenda towards Latin America, as expressed in the summits encompassing the European, Latin American and Caribbean states, that are to meet again in Vienna in May 2006. The Ibero-American Community, in essence, should be functioning as a lobby similar to the one that the French speaking countries have enjoyed in the African, Pacific, and Caribbean (ACP) bloc, before and after the accession of the former British colonies, when the UK membership altered considerably the nature of a bloc of aid-receiving countries that was earlier basically African.

In a way, replicating the uniqueness of the nature of the EU, the Ibero-American complex could exploit its lack of comparison and built strength from its isolating example. After all, other experiments in similar regions (the Arab world as the most obvious) that may show a cultural common fabric have been a failure that needs not to be repeated. Exporting a successful example of cooperation among countries only sharing heritage and not current conditions might be a thought to be considered. There is nothing to lose and potential partners in the hemisphere may find it profitable to join.

Obstacles and Challenges

On the negative side, one still can detect a limited perception of the true potential of the Ibero-American process as system. This is an additional expression sparingly used by some enthusiastic experts to describe its consistence and solidness, beyond the weakness of its cyclic performance around its summits. Moreover, the negative image includes of capability for selecting an agenda with a guarantee to be implemented with success

This means that it should be equipped with a **budget** well above the funds designated to cover the payroll of the basic staff infrastructure. This budget should be used to cover for the expenses if the annual summits, as well as for administering the cooperation programs developed by the Ibero-American process. Taking into account that the Latin American countries resist commitment for a common funding in more important forums than the Ibero-American process the prospects of success in this setting are extremely limited. Just about US \$ 5 million to support the General Secretariat's operations with a small staff of professionals in different degrees of government detachment is not an impressive banner to pitch the sustainability of the process. The Ibero-American complex will then suffer the image competition of the EU framework that enjoys considerable aid and trade resources with its own budget.

That also means that the process, if it really wants to shed the perception of Spanish dependency, has to drastically alter the budgetary contributions when Spain appears to pay more than 80% of the expenses and Portugal barely 1.41%, while some important Latin American countries are well below their real capabilities (Brazil 5.17%; Mexico 5.18%; Argentina 2.97%). At the end of 2004, some important countries (Venezuela and Brazil, among them) had not yet paid their

contributions since 2001. Paradoxically, the need to avoid the appearance of a Spanish hegemony will not hide the obvious wish by Spain to prime this Latin American dimension as part of a wider world foreign policy. Much the same way as U.S. foreign aid cannot be seen simply as an altruistic, charitable agenda, the Ibero-American cultural setting and political and economic investment made by Spain should be understood as an integral part of foreign policy. The question remaining is: to what extent and with what limits?

In any event, one should report a contrast between the good intentions and positive diplomatic declarations issued by Latin American leaders and the ambivalent mischievous smiles that simultaneously welcome surveys and questioning of experts in the field, when asked about the prospects and feasibility of the process beyond its current shape. However, with the same guarded attitude not to be revealed in public, numerous Latin American political and economic leaders see the Ibero-American experiment as an **alternative** to balancing the obvious dependency of the United States overpowering security, military, and economic hegemony. Still, continental and world-wide realities force the same observers to look towards Washington for cues and moves.

In this sense, a rephrasing of a popular statement attributed to long lasting and authoritarian Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, for some Latin American countries the problem is to be so far from Spain and Europe and so close to the United States. Moreover, experts and leaders are not in agreement regarding the convenience and advantage of an alliance without conditions with Spain (Portugal is a much minor partner) if that implies causing friction with other European business and political

partners that still have considerable weight in Latin America. That category includes mainly France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, and to a minor extent Italy and the Netherlands, depending on business sectors and geographical location.

Regarding the conversion of the process in a more ambitious, **intercontinental free trade or economic bloc**, any temptation in this direction will encounter internal and external obstacles, in addition to the expected contrasts emanating from each of the individual actors, depending on their state of security and economic dependency. In view of the fractious state of the Western Hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the Ibero-American group is faced with certain alternatives, some offering advantages, but none free from risks. It is obvious that the continent offers two geographical alternatives, one led by the United States and the countries still willing to follow the path set in 1994 and the second composed of most of the MERCOSUR and Andean countries that bet for a South American bloc. The Ibero-American group will have to opt for a hands-off attitude or betting for an alliance with the South-American side. What remains to be seen is what will be the attitude of the “dissidents” who know that their security and primary interests lie with the United States.

In this setting, within the Latin American context, each one of the members will first have to define each individual role in the sub-regional schemes (NAFTA, MERCOSUR, etc.) to which they belong. Then they will have to set the bloc aims and limitations, before embarking into an intercontinental linkage that could contradict the requirements and limitations of both the EU and the inter-American or Latin American frameworks. In view of the “red lines” posed by the profiles of national sovereignty in Latin America and the resistance for institutionalization of the modest

intra-Latin America schemes, not much is to be expected from any design for the Ibero-American process to go beyond the current limits.

The experience shown by the dramatic reduction of the status accorded to the SEGIB, the message is doubly clear. On the one hand, very little will emanate from Latin America in the direction of creating a supranational unit with a minimum of autonomy to represent the bloc in world forums. On the other hand, funding appears to be lacking. Comparatively, a standard evaluation of international networks equipped by small or large staff is that institutions without political and financial power are reduced to simple bureaucracies. Enrique Iglesias will then have to walk a thin line to balance his mission for efficiency with avoiding overstepping on any sensitive toes. Although the status of observer at the United Nations is an improvement, it remains to be seen how that position will be accorded the representation of the group regarding measures and decisions. In this line of thought, the most formidable **risk** presented to the Ibero-American process will be the temptation of using it for national or personal gains, especially if its stature is enriched in the international setting. A move to radicalize it, if only in the discourse and verbal setting, may trigger a reaction of the moderate governments and the ones opposing its use for confrontational policies, especially if they target the interests of the United States. Keeping a **low profile** may in turn mean inertia and business as usual.

In any event, a key factor for getting some answers for this dilemma depends on the individual and overall results of the dozen elections to take place in Latin America by the end of 2006. If a majority of center-left and radical leftist government come to

power and the incumbent presidents are consolidated, any kind of forums may seem to be good for deepening anti-U.S. postures. It remains to be seen if the Ibero-American system will become one. However, in the event of a continuation of a disdainful or erratic policy of the United States towards Latin America, Spain may interpret it as an invitation for political incursions in a continent where its economic interests are at stake. With the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia, his stopover in Madrid in early January in a pre-inauguration tour taken to Europe and Africa may indicate a signal in the direction of a confirmation for a more assertive Spanish policy in Latin America. Uncertainty regarding Spanish energy investments in the Andean country will then be a key factor in this case.

In conclusion, the project depends more on the good will and the positive evaluation done by the Latin American countries than on the potential and means supplied by Spain and its geopolitical ambitions. A key fitting argument is the perception that this move is generated in the **United States** and Canada. An option often followed in North America, especially in the United States, is that in principle any European intrusion in Latin America is considered as a violation of the remains of the Monroe Doctrine and suspect of presenting a counterbalance to the US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. When political incursion has been supplemented by economic enterprises, it has usually been considered as adding insult to injury. In general, then, what has been good for Europeans in America has been judged as bad for the United States. In a global economy this logic does not always apply. Economic partnership and loyal competition might be in the long run mutually profitable.

Canada, with its long tradition of combining economic activity and political cooperation with development aid and peace keeping

operations, should aim at making the Ibero-American process an advantage and not a negative challenge. Still, it all depends on the outcome of the real interest of the Latin American countries in the upgrading of the Ibero-American process. In the event that a leftist wave takes over and then proceeds to use the forum as an anti-U.S. mechanism, the dilemma for Canada will be to choose between what has been very often an affordable policy of confronting Washington in limited issues such as Cuba and pondering about a global strategy in which much more is at stake. In any case, with popular pressure in the increase for stressing the differences in national identity with the

powerful southern neighbor, the Ibero-American system may offer a suitable channel.

In any case, the lack of regulatory definition regarding the status of observers and special guests for the Ibero-American summits and process has been accompanied by petitions to participate and individual requests seeking to be invited. The flexibility that exists in multilateral diplomacy will surely find creative solutions for it appears to be considerable outside interest in the process. This solution will certainly accommodate the inclusion of actors in North-America, the Caribbean, the African Portuguese countries and some other European states with Latin origin languages.

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