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Op-Ed Made in North America

Olga Abizaid

A year after the launching of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) in Waco, Texas, the leaders of Canada, Mexico and the US met again at the end of March in Cancun, Mexico, to evaluate its achievements to date and to set new objectives.

Some of you may have never heard of the SPP before and are probably asking yourselves why you should pay attention to this process at all. Call it "aggressive incrementalism" or the way you want, the truth is that the SPP is the framework for deeper North American integration and it is moving forward. The SPP works within the parameters of existing legislation on areas where advances can be achieved and is organized in a set of ad hoc working groups composed by government and key stakeholders (business, legislators, sub-national governments or social organizations depending on the issue area). Issues considered as too politicized, as the softwood lumber dispute or Mexican migration, were left aside.

Defined as a dynamic, open and permanent process to promote security, prosperity and to enhance people's quality of life in North America, the SPP is first and foremost the response to a new paradigm: the predominance of security in the US' agenda after the terrorist attacks of 2001. With the notion of security trumping trade, the three countries agree to cooperate in this realm to ensure that legitimate flows of people, goods and services move across the borders without undue delays.

The SPP is also the recognition that while there are no constituencies in North America for "big ideas" or major institutional build-ups *à l'euro péenne*, interdependence between the countries cannot be ignored and that bottom-up demands for the facilitation of border flows need to be attended. More importantly, it is the acknowledgement of a—nascent, if you will—trilateral dimension within North America, even if some of the initiatives included in it are explicitly bilateral.

Think Security: Think Borders

The SPP security initiatives aim at protecting the region from perceived external and internal threats—drawing a security perimeter—and to the management of internal borders. The most easily identifiable developments on this front are in law enforcement and border security. A Trilateral Senior Law Enforcement Plenary was created last year, and throughout the year both Canadian and Mexican agencies (civil and military) charged with the enforcement of law have increased cooperation and committed to exchange information and to coordinate with their US counterparts to fight organized crime and terrorism. Important discussions on security have taken place bilaterally and trilaterally, including protection of energy and communications

critical infrastructure, emergency and pandemic preparedness, and criteria to screen travelers.

Advances in the Canada-US and the Mexico-US border security include the development of more fast lanes (FAST and NEXUS) and the implementation of new technologies to filter potential threats from legitimate flows of goods and expedite customs procedures. Discussions are taking place to develop biometric identification cards to enable fast border crossings of people. Mexico and the US also signed a protocol to coordinate actions to reduce violence at the border and established a pilot project allowing US immigration and customs check-ups in Cancun with reciprocation for Mexican authorities at the airport in Atlanta.

Security discussions, however, are not without challenges and disagreements. In the absence of a common definition of security, tensions around this issue (and its implications for trade) and law enforcement will persist.

The Other Side of Security: Prosperity

Mirroring the security discourse, the agenda on prosperity aims at ensuring economic security in response of a perceived loss of competitiveness vis-à-vis Asia and Europe. To make North America the best place to invest, the SPP promotes remedying market distortions and reducing transaction costs through regulatory compatibility and the enhancement of productivity. That is why the three countries have worked on changing the rules of origin established in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in a number of products to allow firms in the region to import lower-cost inputs from abroad for their manufactures and still benefit from preferential access in North America.

The SPP also includes the development of trilateral sectoral strategies in key sectors to create and maximize regional competitive advantages (including energy, steel, and the automobile industries—key to security). Progress was also made in sectors like textiles, and there is potential for the inclusion of new initiatives for instance in the chemical sector, information technologies, and mining. Other sectors? Think aerospace. With the signature of a Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement between Mexico and the US—allowing for inspections and certifications in situ—production lines in this industry could become trilateral and US and Canada's investments in Mexico would consolidate, perhaps emulating the experience of the automobile industry. Just last year, Canadian-owned firm Bombardier announced an investment of US\$200 million over seven years in Mexico to assemble aircrafts.

The SPP and North American integration

In Cancun, US President George W. Bush stated that one of the objectives of the agenda on prosperity sought to connect the benefits of NAFTA with improvements in the quality of lives of the people of North America. The results-oriented approach of the SPP is geared to progressively create constituencies for this project. After a year, however, the SPP remains unknown for most people in North America, particularly in the US (EKOS,

12/2005), and this is a challenge in terms of the perceived legitimacy of the project.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the SPP was ensuring continuity. In an electoral year, this question was essential, given that the SPP is driven by the countries' executives. So far, it survived the change of government in Canada, and it will have to pass the test in the summer in Mexico. However, with a new *rendez-vous* in Canada for 2007 and the creation of the North American Competitiveness Council, the process has refilled its tank.

Yet some questions remain. While most newspapers underscored the joint decision by the three governments and the private sector to boost competitiveness and face threats coming from other economic blocs, the three countries have also moved to facilitate the establishment or continuation of production linkages with other regions or countries (*i.e.* China—one of the main trading partner for each country—or the Central American Free Trade Agreement members). So whether it will opt to be a closed or an open region, for those interested in comparative politics, it seems that North America is moving perhaps closer to the Asian model of integration rather than the European. ■

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COUNTERPOINT

Counterpoint is a musical technique involving the simultaneous sounding of separate musical lines. Like in music, different voices can enrich our understanding of events.

Costa Rica: Democracy on Trial

Cecilia Cortés

This past February 5 Costa Rica joined the group of Latin American countries holding elections in 2006. On that occasion, the population elected a President and two Vice Presidents, as well as deputies of the National Assembly and city councillors. The extremely close electoral results, however, have jeopardized Costa Rica's democracy, which although one of the strongest on the continent, nevertheless shows signs of weakening, much like other democracies of the region have for some time now. Let us examine some characteristics of the Costa Rican scenario.

Poor Representation

The political culture of Costa Rica has been exhibiting cracks reflected in low voter turnout in the country in recent electoral processes: 81.1 % in 1994; 70% in 1998; 68.86% in 2002 and 65.5% in 2006. In consequence, elected political leaders are less and less representative, which directly influences the degree of governability of the democratic system. Furthermore, low civic participation in an election is likely to translate into a government that responds more to the objectives and interests of private groups.

Despite the fact that Costa Rica is already a solid democracy, its citizenry has been demonstrating profound discontent with its primary democratic institutions. According to *Latinobarómetro*, support for democracy in the country dropped from 80% in 1996 to 73% in 2005, while 82% of Costa Ricans lack faith in the political parties, and 67% distrust Congress.

Reconstitution of the Electoral Supply

As in the majority of Latin American countries, political parties in Costa Rica have been losing their ties to the populace, their capacity for aggregation and linking together the various voices of the people. They have become mere electoral machines that make representation effective through rules and formulas embodied in the electoral system. In the words of Uruguayan scholar Juan Rial, they are "empty vessels, mere vehicles for the activities of interest groups."

On February 5, civic control was exercised in Costa Rica, and clearly the political parties were asked to provide accountability. The Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) distinguished by its poor governmental management and by much-talked-of cases of corruption, spectacularly lost its electoral momentum, falling to a shameful 5%. The Libertarian Movement (*ML*), despite an opportunistic change in campaign rhetoric, failed in its attempt to increase representation in the Legislative Assembly. The National Liberation Party (PLN), which won by a mere 18,000 votes—a triumph tinged with failure and a failure tinged with triumph—received a weak mandate, far from the

overconfident position of its candidate Óscar Arias. Although during the campaign Arias appeared to be intransigent in regard to negotiation and the search for agreements with other political forces, he will now be obliged to build them in response to the message sent by the electorate. The Citizens' Action Party (PAC)—the big winner in many people's opinion—becomes the second strongest force, although it will have to work to maintain electoral support based on a good performance in the Legislative Assembly—something that remains to be seen given its failure to do so after its first four years in Congress.

The PAC, which is still undergoing a process of consolidation, must be prudent in managing the victory it has achieved, which positions it as the true opposition. Being a young party, its internal contradictions and the pressures of the various minority groups it comprises will truly put it to the test during the next four years.

Quality of Democracy

As mentioned earlier, Costa Rica does not escape the challenges democracy faces in Latin America. For almost a decade the symptoms of weakening of the Costa Rican model have been front and centre without any reaction—or especially consequent action—by the political class or the parties. As such, disappointment with democracy's poor performance, and the failure to address it responsibly, by the most important political actors has created a vicious circle that is dragging Costa Rica along dangerous paths.

This democratic crisis in Costa Rica requires a broad national agreement in which the main ingredient is placing the country's stability and viability as a priority. For some time now, countless diagnoses have pointed to the causes of the social stagnation and deterioration of the health and education systems, and indicated that the accumulation of capital is favouring certain sectors of Costa Rican society in contrast to vast sectors of the population who continue losing purchasing power and quality in social services.

Certainly, there is increasing socio-economic inequality in Costa Rica.

Short-Term Challenges

Therefore, the first challenges the new government will have to face have to do with its capacity for negotiation in order to project the minimum agenda necessary to respond effectively to the country's urgent needs and, above all, to the search for the best means to resolve the deep structural problems from which the country is suffering, including: a 25-year lag in public infrastructure, an internal debt that consumes more than a third of the national budget and is permanently on the rise; the absence of leadership and vision to efficiently adapt the country to the changing conditions of the environment.

The message of February 5 is clear, and must be addressed quickly and seriously. Nevertheless, further to a revision of institutions, we must acknowledge that the problem is that on the path toward achieving democracy, politics must reacquire its ethical dimension in order for the government to get back on a course based on principles of responsibility and efficiency, which will allow for regaining trust in democracy and in politics itself. ■

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Costa Rica's Presidential Elections

Beth Schmierer

"Óscar Arias Sánchez will become president on May 8. I wish him the best and I hope that God guides him to a successful presidential term." With these words, Citizen Action Party (PAC) candidate Ottón Solís ended a month-long deadlock over who won the February 5 presidential elections in Costa Rica.

The election, its deadlock, and the final result shed light on an ideological chasm in Costa Rica. On one side stand supporters of Óscar Arias and his traditional social democratic party, the National Liberation Party (PLN). Arias is a former president of Costa Rica, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and a proponent of free trade and market-oriented economic policies. On the other side of the spectrum stand supporters of Ottón Solís and the PAC, founded as an alternative to Costa Rica's traditional parties. Solís opposes neoliberalism, privatization, and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

These disparate platforms went head-to-head on February 5, when 65% of Costa Rican voters cast their ballots. Initial exit polls indicated a virtual tie between Arias and Solís with both candidates obtaining 40% of the vote. It appeared that voters favoured Arias by roughly 3,000 votes; however, many votes from the populated San José province—a province that favoured Solís—had yet to be counted. Given the close nature of the vote, the Superior Electoral Tribunal conducted two manual counts and found that 40.5% of Costa Ricans supported Arias and 40.3% supported Solís.

For many observers, it was surprising that the election was so close. Just two weeks before Costa Ricans cast their ballots, opinion polls gave Arias a 25-point lead over Solís. Arias and his supporters were practically planning their victory party. However, given Costa Rica's divided populace as reflected in the different PLN and PAC platforms, it should not have surprised many that the election was so close. In fact, two more polls conducted four days before the election showed that Arias' support was waning and Solís' support was rising rapidly.

What accounts for the last-minute surge in support for Solís? Opinion polls conducted before the election estimated that 20% of voters were undecided. It turns out that the majority of undecided voters went to the polls and supported Solís. Furthermore, recent studies conducted by the University of Costa Rica indicate that the majority of people who voted for Solís decided to do so at the last minute.

Solís also garnered more support than expected because the traditional party system in Costa Rica has broken down. For the past 25 years, voters have elected either the PLN or the Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC)—referred to by many Costa Ricans as the "PLUSC" duopoly. However, citizens challenged this for the first time in 2002 by voting for multiple parties in the presidential elections. In 2004, corruption scandals further weakened Costa Rica's party system. In a matter of weeks, former Presidents Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (PUSC, between 1998 and 2002), Rafael Ángel Calderón (PUSC, between 1990 and 1994), and José María Figueres (PLN, 1994 and 1998) were implicated in major corruption scandals. In this way, Solís benefited from the breakdown of the "PLUSC" and the corruption scandals. For many voters, a vote for Solís was, in fact, a vote of protest against traditional politics.

Finally, Solís attracted supporters by positioning himself as the only contender who would oppose CAFTA as it is currently written. Roughly 35% of Costa Ricans oppose CAFTA and Solís locked in their support. On the other hand, Costa Ricans who support CAFTA cast their vote for a number of presidential candidates who also supported CAFTA, including Arias, Otto Guevara from the

Libertarian Movement (LM), and Jaime Toledo from the PUSC.

Given that Óscar Arias won the election by only 0.2% of the vote, it would be easy to conclude that his presidency will be strained by illegitimacy. However, just as Costa Ricans surprised us at the polls, they will likely surprise us by accepting their president as legitimate. The 2006 election succeeded on many fronts. It got the message across that citizens are tired of the status quo. It showed that voters have the right to scrutinize the behaviour of their politicians and they will punish those who misbehave. And it proved that politicians cannot force important legislation through congress (such as CAFTA) without a spirited public debate. As Arias prepares to take the oath of office in May, one thing is clear: The 2006 presidential election proved that Costa Rica is still a paragon of democracy in Central America.■

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Open Debate or Signals of Conflict Within the Cuban Elite?

Ana Faya

An interview with Fidel Castro published in a Spanish newspaper and an article published in an official Cuban journal have raised questions about the different positions that the Cuban elite might have in regards to the *succession* process and its potential leadership. *Succession*—not *transition*—is the official term used on the island to refer to the period immediately following the government of Fidel Castro.

In its Sunday edition, the Spanish daily *El País* published a fragment of an interview with the Cuban leader by Ignacio Ramonet, director of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and a journalist close to the Cuban government. In his answers to Ramonet, Castro discusses his health condition and reaffirms the idea already launched in late November about the potential “self-destruction” of the Cuban process. But more importantly, Castro indicates that the succession process in Cuba should be led by someone from “the third generation” of Cubans, and not by Raúl Castro, the successor officially designated according to Cuban laws (“Castro: ‘Este país puede autodestruirse’”, *El País*, 02/04/06).

A few weeks before, the digital edition of *La Jiribilla* published—but then completely removed from its pages—an article by Manuel David Orrio, a Cuban residing on the island, where the author directly criticizes Fidel Castro for amendments made to the Constitution in 2002 declaring the “irreversibility” of socialism in Cuba. The author also objects the “premises” proposed by Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque—a top official from “the third generation”—to avoid the collapse of socialism on the island during the

succession. Orrio also advocates for urgent change, even prior to Castro’s departure from power (“Cuba: Constitución vs. ¿socialismo reversible?”, *CUBASOURCE*, www.cubasource.org).

A significant fact about this article is that its author, Orrio, is an official of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior. Journalist by profession, he infiltrated the ranks of Cuban dissidents as the agent “Miguel”. His identity was revealed by the authorities during the anti-dissidence trials in 2003. Orrio’s article, which appeared in the number 252, March 4-10 edition of *La Jiribilla*, had already been published in *Rebelión* and *Insurgentes*, two digital publications supportive of the Cuban government, which have become repositories for the opinions of Marxist-leaning intellectuals on the tasks to be undertaken in a process of succession on the island.

Castro himself initiated the public debate in Cuba regarding current challenges and the succession process on November 17, 2005 when during a speech to students of the Universidad de La Habana, he admitted to the vulnerability of the Cuban regime in the context of an analysis on prevailing corruption. At the time, the Cuban leader spouted fierce criticism of officials in his own government, and spoke in glowing terms of an “army” of young people that has developed various roles—primarily fighting corruption—under Castro’s own mandate on the fringe of established institutions (Speech delivered by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, *Granma*, www.granma.cubaweb.cu).

The Cuban leader’s speech was followed by remarks by Felipe Pérez Roque in the closing session of the National Assembly (NA) on December 23. In his address to the NA delegates, including Castro, Pérez Roque spoke openly about the post-Castro era and identified three “necessary premises” to avoid the disappearance of socialism at that time. (Statement by Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, MINREX, www.cubaminrex.cu). A critical analysis of these proposals by Marxist Heinz Dieterich in the pages of *Rebelión*, followed Pérez Roque’s speech (“Cuba: Tres premisas para salvar la Revolución a la muerte de Fidel”, *Rebelión*, 03/0106, www.rebelion.org).

The aforementioned assertions by Castro published in *El País* and Orrio's public criticism of the Cuban socialist system and its Head of State add interesting elements to any analysis of Cuba's present and future political junctures. They could be the expression of a deliberate construction aimed at exporting the false image of an open debate that has not yet occurred within Cuba. Or, they could constitute the first clear signals of disagreement between sectors of the elite with respect to the immediate future of the island. But whatever explanations may be behind of these pieces, they cast doubts on the idea disseminated by some experts of a smooth, safe and non-controversial succession in Cuba. Internal conflict could already be darkening the horizon. ■

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COLOMBIA

On February 27, Colombia and the United States finished the negotiation of a free trade agreement (FTA). It is expected that the agreement will be signed within 90 days, after which both countries will have to ratify it. If approved, the FTA will enter into force on January 1, 2007.

However, Colombian groups opposing the FTA are trying to block this initiative through the judiciary. In response to a request submitted by non-governmental organizations and labour unions under the "public interest action" constitutional right (Art. 88), the Cundinamarca Administrative Court demanded on December 12 that the government not subscribe to the sections of the agreement that could encroach on the collective rights of Colombians such as agriculture, phytosanitary measures, subsidies, intellectual property and ancestral knowledge.

The ruling by the Cundinamarca Administrative Court—one of the entities that regulates the internal functioning of the Council of State which includes the Presidency—represents a potential obstacle to the ratification of the FTA since it will weigh in the decision of the Constitutional Court to ratify or not ratify the agreement. According to the 1991 Constitution the process of entering into international agreements involves the executive, legislative and judicial powers. The ratification process of international agreements first requires the approval of Congress and then of the Constitutional Court.

The administration of Álvaro Uribe saw the cautionary measure as a restraint on its negotiation powers and responded by starting a national tour to promote the treaty as key to generating employment, eradicating poverty and increasing competitiveness. Meanwhile, it has appealed the Court's decision before the Council of State.

St. Kitts and Nevis: Saying Goodbye to Sugar

Terry Nisbett

On July 22, 2005, the St. Kitts Sugar Manufacturing Corporation (SSMC) ceased sugar production, ending an era of more than 300 years of sugar cane and sugar production as the dominant agricultural and manufacturing economic activity in St. Kitts and Nevis. The decision to close the sugar industry was difficult and not taken lightly as evidenced by the long public debate which preceded it. Up until 1990 sugar was the major contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. At its closure the SSMC was the largest single employer in the country. It employed 1,500 persons. This is significant in a small country with a population of 45,000 persons.

The decline in the industry was gradual but definite. Between 1982 and 2002 the contribution of agriculture—then dominated by sugar—fell from 15.17% to 5.52%. Several factors contributing to the decline and most of these were externally driven or beyond the control of the local industry. St. Kitts and Nevis sold its sugar to Europe as one of the Sugar Protocol countries of the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries. The ACP group was granted certain preferential trading arrangements with the European Union (EU) under the Lomé and now the Cotonou economic partnership agreements. As a Sugar Protocol country, St. Kitts and Nevis had a guaranteed quota of sugar to sell to the EU at a price determined annually in Europe.

In fact all the sugar producing states in the Caribbean were facing the fearful uncertainty of a reduced sugar market in Europe, reduced prices for Caribbean sugar and the European move away from sugar imports towards its own beet sugar producers to meet its demand. When the EU announced a drastic cut of 37% in sugar prices, it meant that the SSMC could not survive. It seemed that only Belize and Guyana had production costs low enough to make any profits with such reduced prices. Trinidad and Tobago closed several factories and established a new company in order to become more competitive.

Jamaica too has streamlined its sugar industry. Barbados is down to two factories and is quietly pursuing alternative production from sugar cane and its by-products. The Caribbean space in the European Market will soon be filled by large producers such as Brazil and the African countries. Production costs were high in St. Kitts. The industry had suffered from the damage of repeated hurricanes from 1995 to 2000. The SSMC was already incurring losses. It did not seem worthwhile making any additional investments in the industry.

The costs of closing the sugar industry are high. It could be argued that it might have been less costly to continue production. The mandatory severance payments to the workers is estimated at 40 million Eastern Caribbean dollars. The cost of retraining programs for former sugar workers over an adequate time period will be significant. The government will also bear the cost of social safety net programs to assist families during the period of unemployment. It will have to assume some of the responsibilities previously undertaken by the SSMC such as free medical care of workers.

Though the continued production of sugar would not be profitable under the new market conditions the qualitative benefits of the industry were considerable. The sugar industry served a leading role in the conservation of the environment specifically soil conservation and erosion prevention. If sugar cane were replaced by other crops it is not at this point likely that any other crop would be as effective in this regard. In addition the Sugar Manufacturing Corporation maintained a system of feeder roads to all the sugar estates and sugar cane fields. These roads also provide access to farmers involved in non-sugar agriculture with farms on the middle and higher elevations in St. Kitts. Already there is some deterioration of the roads affecting farmers. The government will have to assume this responsibility if it is to successfully implement a policy for the development of non-sugar agriculture. Even the tourism sector will feel the impact of the closure of the industry. Part of the physical beauty of St. Kitts and a vital part of its tourism product is the attractiveness of the waving fields of canes especially on the mountain slopes and hillsides. It is difficult to measure the value of this asset, but if the tourism product changes, new marketing strategies will have to be adopted. Tourism marketing is always expensive.

Though socio-economic pressures are being managed to a certain extent with retraining programmes, stipends for trainees and pensions for older workers, in a small economy the sudden unemployment of 1,500 persons will dampen economic activity and expenditure. The SSMC itself was a large consumer of goods and services. Its former workers were also a large number of consumers. Small businesses such as village shops in rural communities depended on the reliability of the pay check of the sugar workers in order to do brisk business. Not only in rural communities but throughout the entire economy the reduction of the spending power of such a large group of workers will be missed. Unless this reduction in expenditure can be matched by compensating expansion in other sectors, some deflationary pressures may be exerted. It is still very much a state of uncertainty which eventually should lead to transformation. The economy will require considerable external support to finance the transformation.

Tourism and non-sugar agriculture are likely replacements but definite strategies must be quickly implemented to give hope to the former workers and their families and to the mainly rural communities affected. Tourism is already a vibrant emerging sector and can provide the balance required to offset the loss of the sugar industry. If the tourism authorities target more of the European market, that combined with the visitors from North America will create a longer tourist season and a more robust industry. St. Kitts and Nevis continues to attract investment in the hotel and tourism sector. Currently there are additional hotel facilities as well as holiday condominiums, villas and a new golf course under construction. These will create new jobs as well as entrepreneurial opportunities in micro-businesses and the informal sector.

If these and other strategies are pursued the country may achieve the diversification necessary to relieve the vulnerability that a dependence on preferences helped to create. The excellent telecommunications systems combined with the high literacy rate can provide other diversification avenues and the proximity to Canada and the United States can prove advantageous.

Another interesting and exciting possibility arising out of the demise of the sugar industry is sugar cane production not for food but for energy as ethanol and electricity. Sugar cane may yet remain on the landscape of the Caribbean, even that of St. Kitts and Nevis but it will be a different industry with very different output.■

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Op-Ed

Immigrant Transnationalism in Canada: What We Don't Know

Carlo Dade and Luz Rodríguez-Novoa

Every year, a group of Ecuadorians from Ontario return to their hometown in Ambato to take part in the traditional festivals and the election of the local beauty queen. Recently, the group also has formed a non-profit organization, the *Asociación Benévola de Ambato*, that has raised funds in Ontario to build a daycare and renovate a seniors' facility in Ambato. In Vancouver, a group of Salvadorians immigrants has banded together to form the Canada-El Salvador Action Network (CELSAN), which is working with municipal governments as well as with the national government in El Salvador to jointly fund small-scale community projects. CELSAN has also been active in advocating for more inclusive and democratic development in their home country, and for the granting of political rights to Salvadorians abroad. In Toronto, the Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce is working with the Guyanese Consulate with some success in forging business deals between small-scale producers in both countries and is looking to do more.

These are not isolated examples. Thousands of immigrant groups across Canada are playing an active role in their communities of origin and their influence is enormous.

In 2004, the World Bank estimated that over US\$250 billion was sent by migrants and immigrants (often referred to as "Diasporas") to their communities of origin. This figure is close to three times the total amount of all forms of official development assistance for that year. For Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), US\$45 billion was received in 2004 in the form of remittances. Yet, as the examples above illustrate contributions by Diasporas are wide-ranging and go beyond simple cash transfers to relatives. In addition to remittances, philanthropic activities and political advocacy, Diasporas are major sources of investment in countries of origin. In the case of China, it is estimated that close to 60% of foreign direct investment received by that country in 1990s came from its Diaspora. Immigrant communities are also huge potential markets for producers and businesses in the home country. This is especially true for the Caribbean where it is estimated that 20% of the population of Haiti, 50% of the population of Jamaica and close to 60% of the population of Guyana live abroad.

Over the past five years the international development community has taken note of the role of Diaspora populations and has responded with an outpouring of research, seminars and pilot projects. Led by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and an extensive list of private foundations, universities and bilateral development agencies, there is now a fairly large body of knowledge on remittance flows, Diaspora philanthropic and economic investment, as well as in the dynamic field of cultural and political connections.

Canada has been the exception. More is known, for example, about Diaspora connections between Japan and the Americas than is known about ties between Canada and the region. While there have been isolated studies on migrant and immigrant groups from LAC in Canada, there is still, for example, no comprehensive information on remittance flows and transmission methods, nor had there been outreach by the government or private foundations to understand and support transnational activities by immigrants in Canada.

Within the past year, however, this situation has begun to change as some departments of the Canadian government have become more involved in outreach to Diaspora communities from LAC countries and have begun to support preliminary—yet still modest—research. This has included studies on remittance flows in Canadian universities and think tanks, including research on remittance usage in Jamaica and a mapping study that identified 140 immigrant organizations from 24 LAC countries active in Canada. Major conferences were also held on remittance flows from Canada to Haiti and Jamaica and on Diaspora linkages to private sector development and information technology usage by the Caribbean Diaspora.

A key part of the emerging work on remittances and research into Diaspora linkages was a series of meetings in the fall of 2005 between LAC Diaspora organizations—a majority of which are new or recently created organizations representing both private sector and civil society groups—and Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). These meetings enabled exchanges on the role that LAC Diasporas are playing in fostering political and economic development in their countries of origin and the potential for collaboration on common objectives with the Canadian government.

In line with the emerging research, these activities showcased examples of how vibrant and dynamic Diaspora organizations are deeply connected to their communities of origin and how they are implementing or attempting to initiate small-scale projects in business linkages such as establishing ties between producers back home and distributors in Canada, as well as

philanthropic projects to improve social and economic conditions in specific communities back home. Yet, many of these organizations are new or recently formed and are in need of institutional strengthening assistance. This limits the capacity of what the groups can do and also makes working with them a challenge for governments and traditional development non-governmental organizations.

Research done so far to understand and support the international, or transnational work of these organizations is still insufficient. It appears that what is missing in Canada is awareness on the part of government, developmental and service organizations of the existence—let alone the scope and importance—of the connections and initiatives between Diaspora organizations and their home communities. Clearly what is most needed is improved understanding of the relevance of Diaspora organizations, which will only come from more research and dialogue with these groups. An important first step in this direction is comprehensive information on remittance flows from Canada. Beyond this, a “whole of government” approach to working with Diaspora populations is sorely needed to replace the ad hoc responses that arise during responses to natural disasters and political emergencies. What we are seeing in Canada and what has been clearly demonstrated elsewhere is that Diaspora populations are a huge potential resource. However, in Canada it has remained an untapped resource. ■

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The ideas expressed in this article are the product of research on the theme and of a meeting convened by FOCAL October 26, 2005 in Ottawa and Gatineau where 29 Diaspora groups from LAC countries in Canada dialogued with FAC and CIDA. The first session of that meeting was chaired by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Loyd Axworthy, and the second by Alain Berranger from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The data, report conferences and research mentioned in this article are available at the FOCAL, IDB, IDRC and York University web sites.

¿Apertura o señales de conflicto en la elite cubana?

Ana Faya

Una entrevista a Fidel Castro publicada en un diario español y un artículo publicado en una revista oficial cubana han provocado interrogantes acerca de las diferentes posiciones que la elite cubana pudiera tener con relación al proceso de *sucesión* y a su potencial liderato. *Sucesión*, no *transición*, es el término oficial utilizado en Cuba para referirse al período inmediatamente posterior al gobierno de Fidel Castro.

La edición dominical del periódico español *El País* publicó un fragmento de una entrevista al líder cubano a cargo de Ignacio Ramonet, director de *Le Monde Diplomatique* y periodista cercano al gobierno de la isla. En sus respuestas, Castro se refiere a su estado de salud y reafirma la idea que ya había lanzado en noviembre pasado acerca de la potencial “auto destrucción” del proceso cubano. Pero, más importante aún es su alusión a que el proceso de sucesión en Cuba debería estar dirigido por alguien perteneciente a la “tercera generación” de cubanos, y no por Raúl Castro, el sucesor oficial designado de acuerdo con las leyes vigentes en la isla (“Castro: ‘Este país puede autodestruirse’”, *El País*, 02/04/06).

Algunas semanas antes, la edición oficial de *La Jiribilla* había publicado—aunque fue completamente sacado de sus páginas—un artículo firmado por Manuel David Orrio, un cubano residente en la isla, donde el autor critica directamente a Fidel Castro por las enmiendas introducidas en 2002 a la Constitución, que declararon la “irreversibilidad” del socialismo en Cuba. El autor además rechaza las “premisas” propuestas por el Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores Felipe Pérez Roque—un alto funcionario de la “tercera generación”—para evitar el derrumbe del socialismo durante la sucesión. Orrio además aboga por cambios urgentes, incluso antes de la salida de Castro del poder (“Cuba: Constitución vs. ¿socialismo reversible?”, *CUBASOURCE*, www.cubasource.org).

Lo significativo de este artículo es que su autor es un oficial del Ministerio del Interior de Cuba. Periodista de profesión, Orrio se infiltró en las filas de la disidencia cubana como el agente “Miguel”, hasta que su identidad fue revelada por las autoridades durante los juicios de 2003 contra la disidencia. El artículo de Orrio, publicado en el número 252, de marzo 4-10 de *La Jiribilla*, ya había aparecido en *Insurgentes* y en *Rebelión*, dos publicaciones digitales solidarias con el gobierno cubano, las cuales han devenido depositarias de opiniones de intelectuales de tendencia marxista acerca de las tareas que el proceso de sucesión en la isla deberá emprender.

El debate público en Cuba sobre los problemas actuales y sobre el proceso de sucesión lo inició el propio Castro, en noviembre 17 de 2005, con un discurso dirigido a los estudiantes de la Universidad de La Habana. En este discurso, en medio de un análisis sobre la corrupción imperante, el líder cubano admitió la vulnerabilidad del sistema, arremetió contra funcionarios de su propio gobierno, y elogiosamente se refirió a un “ejército” de jóvenes que bajo su mandato, y al margen de las instituciones establecidas, han desarrollado varias tareas, principalmente contra la corrupción (Speech delivered by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, *Granma*, www.granma.cubaweb.cu).

Las palabras de Castro fueron seguidas de una exposición por Pérez Roque durante la sesión de clausura de los trabajos de la Asamblea Nacional (AN) el 23 de diciembre. En su alocución a los delegados de la AN, donde se encontraba Castro, el ministro de exteriores habló abiertamente del período posterior al mandato del líder cubano, e identificó tres “premisas necesarias” a tener en cuenta durante ese proceso para evitar la desaparición del socialismo (Statement by Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, MINREX, www.cubaminrex.cu). Un análisis crítico sobre estas propuestas de Pérez Roque fue publicado posteriormente por el marxista Heinz Dieterich en las páginas de *Rebelión* (“Cuba: Tres premisas para salvar la Revolución a la muerte de Fidel”, *Rebelión*, 03/0106, www.rebellion.org).

Las aseveraciones de Castro publicadas en *El País* y las críticas públicas de Orrio al sistema cubano y a su jefe de Estado añaden elementos interesantes a cualquier análisis sobre la coyuntura política actual y futura de Cuba. Pudieran ser expresiones de una construcción deliberada para exportar una falsa imagen de apertura, que todavía no ha ocurrido en el país; o pudieran constituir las primeras señales claras de desacuerdos entre sectores de la elite respecto al futuro inmediato de la isla. Pero, cualesquiera que sean las explicaciones que subyacen detrás de estas publicaciones, ambas arrojan dudas acerca de la idea difundida por varios expertos acerca de una sucesión en Cuba tranquila, segura y sin obstáculos. Pudiera ser que conflictos internos hayan comenzado a nublar el horizonte. ■

Ana Faya es Analista Principal en FOCAL.

Abstracts

Mujer Indígena y Gobernabilidad en Guatemala

By Meeylyn Lorena Mejia Lopez

El presente informe de investigación ofrece un análisis del proceso histórico y de las condiciones que los pueblos indígenas, y en particular las mujeres indígenas, enfrentan sistemáticamente para participar en los diferentes niveles de la sociedad, pero especialmente en los procesos políticos del país.

Recent Chinese Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Canadian Perspective

By Florencia Jubany and Daniel Poon

This paper explores the triangular impact of China's involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for Canadian interests in the region. It looks at the political dimensions of Sino-Latin American relations, considers issues that are of particular importance to Canadian policy in the Americas, and assesses whether these could be affected by Chinese activity in LAC. The report also examines sub-regional and country-specific dynamics and draws implications for Canadian foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere.

The New Axis of Trade: A Brief Assessment of Sino-Brazilian Economic Relations since 2000

By Renato Amorim

Although frequently described as complementary economies, Brazil and China increasingly compete on a number of industrial sectors. China is affecting labor-intensive industries in Brazil and is rapidly gaining market share in more technologically advanced segments. Public perception about bilateral economic relations has swung widely in Brazil, from widespread awe in 2004 to widely held anti-China positions in 2005. In the beginning of 2006, those extreme views seem to be giving way to more serene positions. Especially in Brazil, it seems to be getting clear China carries a complex combination of opportunities and challenges, and the country could largely benefit from China's economic growth should it implement the right policies to boost competitiveness and trade.

Events

"Where Can Canada Really Make a Difference"

A public conference by FOCAL and the Canadian Institute for International Affairs to analyze the challenges and opportunities in Latin America and the role Canada should play in the region. It will take place on Friday, April 21, 2006 at the Lester B. Pearson Building Ottawa, Canada.

For more information, visit: <http://www.focal.ca/>

"Territorio Indígena, Recursos Naturales y Gobernabilidad: Desafíos"

This seminar was held at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City on April 6, 2006, in collaboration with the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation.

"Mapping the Media in the Americas"

On April 6, 2006, a new map of the communications media in Guatemala was made public in Guatemala City. The map, launched in parallel with the seminar "El mapeo de los medios de comunicación en Guatemala: Implicaciones para la sociedad y políticas guatemaltecas," is the latest released as part of the project.

Visit the project web site: <http://www.mediamap.info/>.

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) is an independent policy institute based in Ottawa that fosters informed analysis, debate and dialogue on social political and economic issues facing the Americas. We support a greater understanding of these issues in Canada and throughout the region. FOCAL was founded in 1990 and has a full time staff of 12 people. The Board of Directors provides a strategic guidance to the organization and its activities.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this electronic newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL).

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