

# CEPAL

## Review

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# CEPAL

## Review

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## Scenarios for the new era

*Ernesto Ottone\**

This article aims to present some salient aspects of the reflections of the distinguished thinker José Medina Echavarría on the problems of peace, the cold war and the prospects for *détente*.

In his analysis of these prospects, Medina Echavarría considers three possible scenarios for *détente*: *competitive détente*, *conflictive détente*, and *co-operative détente*. The latter scenario assumes the abandonment of the Cold War mentality.

Although for a number of years this prospective exercise seemed to be totally divorced from the course of events, the turnaround in the international situation which has taken place in recent years has brought this kind of analysis back into the limelight.

In view of this, the present article takes up various concepts of surprising actuality put forward by Medina Echavarría fifteen years ago, in order to try to identify the most important features of the present international scene, its consistency and the risk of another turnaround, and to analyse its possible evolution towards a "co-operative order".

\*Deputy Secretary of the Commission. The author wishes to express his gratitude for the comments made by Aníbal Pinto.

## I

### The structure of the cold war

In 1976, José Medina Echavarría published his most extensive essay on the problems of peace, the cold war and *détente*, presenting some highly perceptive reflections on the structure of the peace that was formed after the war, with particular reference to its effects on the development of Latin America<sup>1</sup>.

That structure, which we know as the "Cold War", was characterized in particular by the division of the world into opposing and antagonistic ideological and military blocs which implied the existence of separate worlds with different and irreconcilable characteristics. It came into being after a brief consensual interregnum after the Second World War in which, as a result of that terrible experience, the victorious powers aimed to set up a structure of permanent co-operation which assumed its institutional form in the creation of the United Nations.

Although that institutional form survived, however, the spirit of that period did not last long: within a few years, the bounding rivalry of the victorious powers took possession of the entire international scene.

Although originally there were marked differences between the United States of America and the Soviet Union in economic, technological and military power, the equality generated by the possession of nuclear weapons on both sides soon gave rise to a balance of power which prevented any irresistible hegemony on either side and favoured instead the establishment of two opposing hegemonic projects. This situation was to last for years and to give rise to the basic rules of the game.

As from 1948, in Medina Echavarría's words, "a situation arose in which, just as in the lasting social stratification of the *ancien régime*, everybody was perfectly conscious of the place he should and in fact did occupy. All the forms of internal or external, national and international con-

<sup>1</sup> See José Medina Echavarría, Latin America in the possible scenarios of *détente*, *CEPAL Review*, No. 2, Santiago, Chile, second half of 1976. All the quotations from Medina Echavarría in this article come from that essay.

duct only exist and can be understood as obvious in the light of the inevitably present antagonism. This is so up to the point that when in certain years some countries define themselves as non-aligned, they do not need to declare the meaning of this nor ask what it means to abandon the ranks”.

This historical process of division into separate worlds, however, was to have the common feature of rapid economic growth and a shared faith in development, while a Third World was to emerge, generated by the breaking up of the colonial world.

Paradoxically, this process of worldwide growth was to take place against the background of the ever-present danger of total war and the expressions of latent conflicts which would give rise to constant local conflicts or to support for such conflicts in terms of global rivalry: in the words of Medina Echavarría: “On both sides, whether or not fully aware of the facts, the people seemed to be living quite happily the same paradox of enormous development in the shadow of catastrophe”. Not only did the existence of the opposing blocs tend to crystallize international loyalties, whether willing or unwilling, as allies or satellites, or both of these at once, but also: “the structure of the Cold War, with its rigorous limitation of the enemy and of antagonistic doctrines, at the same time fixed the ambit of the internal confrontations: both the admissible and the inadmissible. The play of political ideas and organizations was restricted by the peril represented by the presence of the enemy”.

As everyone knows, however, history does not admit of crystallization, and already by the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s the scheme was beginning to crumble.

The Third World emerged with new prominence after the oil crisis of 1973; new poles of economic power such as Japan and Europe were consolidated and broke up the symmetrical structure of military and economic power.

On the international agenda, side by side with the East-West conflict, ever-increasing importance was assumed by the contradictions that grew up between the North and the South, whose relative weight became increasingly unequal and generated enormous gaps between the levels of living of the respective populations.

It was already clear by now that the arms race could not be won by anyone and that it was doomed to a perverse dead-heat, at increasingly dangerous levels. All these new realities tended to severely erode the whole scheme of the Cold War and to generate defections and a search for fresh independence on both sides.

Economic growth, which had seemed to be following an upward trend for all concerned, began to slacken in the North and to stagnate in the South, thus ushering in a prolonged period of crisis.

Latin America lived through the years of growth as a natural part of the West, linked with the United States by the closest possible military, economic and political links.

Despite its sharp repercussions, the Cuban Revolution remained an isolated case of “changing sides”. After the period of rapid growth, however, the symptoms of the crisis hit the region hard also, and in Medina Echavarría’s words: “substitution industrialization, for example, seems to stagnate when it reaches a certain level, the biggest obstacle lying in external factors. This is a point which brings in, through the relative marginalization in the merchandise market and the financial field of investment, consideration of the newly confirmed validity of the hypothesis of “external strangulation” and the realities of growing indebtedness”.

This already obvious exhaustion was to lead from the 1970s onwards to a long period of neo-liberal experiments, of the further heightening of exclusions, and of authoritarian solutions as formulas for regaining the lost growth and maintaining a threatened social order. This cycle was not to avoid the worsening of the crisis, however, and in the 1980s it was to show a tendency to be reversed through the processes of democratization, which, however, were not able to change the increasingly negative trends in economic and social matters.

The beginning of the crisis in the structure of the Cold War, which was to be expressed in the form of the loss of importance of bipolarism and the emergence of more complex situations in the power circles of the world, was to coincide with a world economic crisis which was to have far-reaching effects on Latin America.

## II

**The crisis in the structure of the cold war, and the possible scenarios**

Medina Echavarría's reflections on the possibility of the end of the Cold War were based on these new realities which had been emerging in the world.

It may be recalled that in the mid-1970s there were large-scale political and diplomatic efforts among the great powers to reach certain agreements. These were the years of nuclear arms restrictions and of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: the years of "*détente*".

Everything seemed to indicate that the conviction had grown among the superpowers that, in the face of a more disaggregated and complex world, there were no possibilities for either a "pax americana" or for the triumph of "real socialism" in the world, and that the United States of America and the Soviet Union seemed to be doomed to a permanent military stalemate.

On the basis of his observation of the new tendencies which were emerging, Medina Echavarría constructed an interesting set of three possible future scenarios for *détente* which, of course, would not be expressed in a pure form in real circumstances: competitive *détente*, conflictive *détente* and co-operative *détente*.

Briefly, *competitive détente* represented the prolongation of the situation established from the 1960s onwards and would be characterized by the persistence of the existing limited conflicts, and by a number of shared aspirations or common fears.

*Conflictive détente* is marked by the intensification of conflicts and by its character of total and absolute confrontation, from which a nuclear holocaust cannot be excluded.

*Co-operative détente*, for its part, which will be analysed in greater detail below, postulates positive changes in the existing situation whereby the conflict is reduced, the bipolarization of international relations becomes less marked, and previously unknown levels of independence and consensus are achieved.

This set of scenarios has two virtues and one limitation.

The first of these virtues is that it includes possible scenarios which involve the end of the Cold War: a prospect difficult to conceive at that time because of the intellectual weight of the division of the world, in the light of which the international situation was visualized.

The second virtue is the flexible nature of the projected scenarios and their indicative character, which makes it possible to grasp the various forms and combinations in which history can evolve.

The limitation, as we can now see with hindsight, lies in the tremendously precarious nature of the moment of *détente*.

This precariousness lay in the persistent view among those negotiating agreements that they were living in two separate and competing worlds. What impelled them to negotiate was not the perception of some common ground around which a natural association could grow up, but the impossibility of the victory of one side over the other. Both superpowers were convinced that they were the exponents of the model of the future, but at the same time they realized that at least for the moment it was impossible to impose that model.

An agreement whose significance to the parties involved is merely that of giving a breathing space which enables them to rebuild their forces or gain advantages can necessarily only be short lived, and indeed, the moment of *détente* lasted a very short time.

The "uses of *détente*" were seen in terms of power considerations, so that although it was possible to consolidate the Yalta scheme and to preserve peace in the North, conflicts were multiplied in the South.

Quite apart from their various causes, which included anticolonial, religious, nationalist or ethnic reasons, such conflicts were "picked up" in a sense by the great powers and were supported or combated, fed or throttled, as a function of their real or artificial proximity to their respective ideological symbols.

Within a few years, the United States felt adversely affected by the situation thus created, well as weakened in its role of leader of a West which had slowly but surely been recovering from

the shock of the 1973 energy crisis and had decisively strengthened its central position in the world economy.

The Soviet Union, for its part, increasingly sought to expand its alliances and influence in the South in order to achieve a new global balance of power. All this naturally led to a conflictive situation, to the blockage of the main agreements, and to the reappearance of overtones of the Cold War and the prevalence of a mentality based on the idea of blocs.

If we use the same set of scenarios as Medina Echavarría, we must admit that at the beginning of the 1980s, not only had events not resulted in a scenario of co-operative *détente*, but the situation of competitive *détente* which could be described as characterizing the structure of international relations in the 1960s had tended to deteriorate towards a conflictive scenario in the sense that he had in mind when he said that such a scenario "does not refer so much to the existence of conflicts, which are always possible in any circumstances, but to the higher degree of their intensity, to the moment in which quantity is transformed into quality, once again giving the conflicts involved a total and absolute character".

Thus, the situation at the end of the 1970s and the early part of the 1980s was midway between the competitive and conflictive scenarios.

Those years witnessed the consolidation of the rapid growth of the United States economy and the multiplication and strengthening of various other economic centres, especially Japan and the European Economic Community.

In Eastern Europe, the first signs began to be observed of economic and political crises whose subsequent intensity was beyond anyone's imagination, and it was in a climate of reform that China re-entered the international community after years of isolation.

The contrast between the more developed and less developed parts of the world became still greater, and the imbalance in economic relations arrived at the absurd point of the existence of an ongoing flow of millions of dollars of resources from South to North in respect of debt payments, leading to a brutal weakening of the peripheral countries, from which few escaped, and the heightening of regional conflicts, accompanied by the resurgence of old and new forms of fanaticism, intolerance and racism.

This black picture was perhaps relieved by some positive features such as the successes registered by the newly industrialized countries and the beginning of the democratization process in Latin America, but there can be no doubt that the situation in the mid-1980s was by no means hopeful as far as world peace and equity were concerned.

### III

#### The great turnaround

In view of the foregoing, it is easy to understand the astonishment caused by the bewilderingly rapid turnaround in the international situation and the tremendous acceleration of past rates of change, which rules out any kind of predictability.

While it would be absurdly pretentious to try to explain this great turnaround in a few lines here, we can at least note that it was neither the result of the success of the two sides involved, nor their failure, nor their meeting in the middle of the road.

In reality, what is happening is the collapse—above all political, but also economic—of the great design which arose with the Russian Revolution and was transformed into "sides",

"blocs" and "systems" as from the end of the Second World War.

The magnitude of the turnaround is due to the "revolutionary" rather than "reformist" nature of the movement set afoot in the East by the ruling Soviet group, which has probably gone further than they originally intended.

The present movement would appear to be directed towards a "revolution" in the classical marxist sense, aimed at transforming the production relations, the power structure and the horizon of values of these societies.

We do not know what the situation in Eastern Europe will be like in a few years' time, but unless

there is a violent reversal of events, which should not be ruled out at least in the Soviet Union, everything seems to indicate that the Eastern European countries are tending to assimilate themselves to their surrounding historical, geographic and cultural world, that is to say, fundamentally to the economic, political and ideological scheme of Western Europe. The European part of the Soviet Union, too, is strongly drawn towards this universe, but it is held back by conservative tensions and fears which increase in proportion as the breakdown of the old unitary structure seems inevitable and the non-European Soviet regions are shaken by the ethnic and religious nationalist storms which the old order concealed.

At all events, the forms of domination, association or settlement of conflicts inside what used to be the "socialist field" will completely change and will also bring about a change in international relations as a whole.

The new situation which has been created shows us how necessary it is to view the future without thinking of it as a mere prolongation of the present and to remember that all established situations are ultimately extremely fragile.

In the light of this new situation, it seems to us very valuable to return to Medina Echavarría's reflections on a possible scenario of co-operative *détente* in order to try to gain a clear idea not so much of the future as of the present situation and its possible evolution.

The first description that he gave was that of "a growing generalization of attitudes guided by universalist points of view" which tend to bring about an awareness by all those concerned of "the reciprocal demands of effective world interdependence".

This description undoubtedly coincides with the present situation, in which there has been a rapid advance by the concepts of a common world, the unity of the human race, and shared responsibility for nature. Never before has there been such a worldwide awareness invoked by all as the ultimate foundation for action.

Naturally, the prevalence of this awareness is not the same thing as the coherent action of all people in all fields, nor does it lead to the disappearance of "dependence", profound imbalances, and the conflict between the worldwide interest in the preservation of nature and the mentality of making profits at all costs, but it does tend to lead

to the establishment of generally shared requirements for the implementation of coherent international discussion and action.

Increasingly, failure to take account of universal implications and a desire for autarky are seen to be in opposition to the "force of events", not only because of their unrealistic nature *vis-à-vis* science, technology, economics and communications, but above all because of the spread of a worldwide ethos of shared values and the generation of a horizon of common political bases for human government. For this reason, the voices still expressing a longing for the opposition of blocs and systems seem increasingly pathetic and marginal.

A second element which is characteristic of the scenario of co-operative *détente* is also of value in analysing the present situation: we refer to the concept of "de-satellization", understood as "more flexibility in the international behaviour of all countries, without there being any fear or threat of immediate conflicts". That definition is perhaps over prudent, however, for its author could hardly imagine at that time that the magnitude of the turnaround would bring into question the very nature of the two sides involved.

The "de-satellization" that we are witnessing, particularly with regard to Eastern Europe, is a process which involves much more than increased flexibility over specific matters: it amounts to the questioning of the entire existing structure of relations which arose from the Cold War, the revision of the Yalta agreements, and the already agreed end of the Warsaw Pact and of the division of Europe.

What is proposed now is the generation of a new structure of international relations with new possibilities for independence, separation, union and groupings obeying historical, geographical or ethnic reasons which the structure of the Cold War had kept silent.

Although "de-satellization" represents the breakup of a conflictive order marked by the lack of independence of many of those involved and brings with it positive elements, it is not automatically the bearer of a juster and more harmonious new order. It also opens the way to new potential conflicts and the resurgence of old spectres which it was believed had been laid to rest.

Undoubtedly, however, what appears to predominate is the positive opportunity for greater le-

vels of independence and greater consensus in international relations.

Perhaps the most symbolically impressive event in this respect has been the reunification of Germany, effected through a process of negotiation whose rapidity has been quite astonishing.

Another event which has been a tremendously eloquent demonstration of the completely new situation was the outcome of the meeting of Heads of State of the 34 member countries of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)<sup>2</sup>, which adopted on 21 November 1990 the "Paris Charter for a New Europe" which breaks with the entire Cold War mentality in the Old World and establishes a set of political mechanisms for regional management based on a new mentality of unity.

In addition to the foregoing, there are other elements noted by Medina Echavarría which could also begin to take shape in the present situation. These include the prospect of establishing "functional authorities with worldwide competence to deal with all the questions and problems of indivisible common interest which can only be settled by the voluntary acceptance of universal decisions".

Until a short time ago, talking in this way would have seemed like sheer utopia, but today this is no longer so, although it is true that we are still far from overcoming the idea of the individual sovereignties of nation-states and establishing regional and international levels of government for some areas where treatment at the purely national level is increasingly at odds with reality. Even so, however, there are processes currently underway at the regional level, as in the case of Europe, where in many spheres these national sovereignties are being overtaken by the force of integration.

Another clear tendency is the strengthening of the *political role* of the United Nations, which appeared to be severely weakened before the turnaround in the international situation. In some spheres, the need for its role as an arbiter has grown so much that it could reasonably be said that the new situation which has grown up could restore to the United Nations the credibility that it had when it was set up in 1945 as an organ of

world unity, with the capacity to help solve the differences and conflicts arising in relations between countries on the basis of the universally accepted principles contained in its Charter.

This assertion is backed up by the examples of a number of conflicts whose solution seemed, to say the least, far off but which have now reached a negotiated solution or are in the process of doing so, almost always with the active participation of the United Nations. Mention may be made in this respect of Afghanistan, the Iraq-Iran conflict, the process of Namibian independence, the changes in South Africa, the negotiations over Kampuchea and Western Sahara, and the progress made in Central America, to name only a few. Without a doubt, the new situation created by the closer contacts and identity of views between the powers which were previously in conflict lies at the very base of this possibility of serving as an arbiter. The future validity of the Organization will depend on the consolidation of this situation.

Among the most perceptive comments made in Medina Echavarría's analysis is undoubtedly his statement that "in a world climate of co-operative *détente* non-authoritarian political regimes would finally prevail": a tendency which would be accompanied by "a lasting period of ideological "decentralization" involving "the possible loss of validity of some traditional ideologies as monolithic bodies".

Both these tendencies have attained far-reaching dimensions and are taking place in an intertwined manner. This is particularly evident in the revolutions in Eastern Europe, whose dimension cannot yet be grasped in all its magnitude but where each of them has as its central elements anti-authoritarianism and the loss of validity of the official ideology.

This is also undoubtedly a dominant trend in Latin America of the 1980s, where liberal democratic ideas and pluralism are making their appearance with irresistible legitimacy.

This phenomenon goes even further, however, extending to the recently decolonized Third World, where for various reasons these elements previously had little place.

A factor which militated against this was the desire on the part of ruling groups to consolidate incipient nation-state situations in which the multi-party system seemed likely to aggravate the religious, ethnic or tribal rivalries that the old colonial

<sup>2</sup> The 32 European countries, plus the United States and Canada (Albania has been an observer since June 1990).

frontiers had left unsolved. There were also cases of cultural and religious contexts that were unsympathetic to pluralistic concepts, while sometimes there was simply a desire to reject the ideas of the ex-colonizing power.

With a few exceptions, the great majority of those regions which went through the process of decolonization that began after the war and became widespread in the 1960s were long characterized by authoritarian or single-party regimes or those based on the existence of a single official ideology. This was so in Africa, where the concept of the "one-party State" was totally predominant in different ideological forms.

In the new world situation, the "total" States of the Third World are seen to have fewer and fewer possibilities of directing and representing their societies and solving their problems.

This could mean that the trend towards democracy and pluralism could encounter in that region too a new legitimacy which it had never before attained. On the other hand, this prospect is made more difficult by the other aspect of the world situation: the growing gulf between North and South which tends to encourage relapses into autarkic and integralist solutions "that use the egocentricity of the rich as a pretext for rehabilitating the egocentricity of the poor" (Hussein, 1989).

## IV

### Towards a global reformist project

As we have seen, high hopes are held out by the new international situation in which an extremely conflictive and ideologized bipolar world whose division represented a threat of catastrophe for the human race has been steered away from the system of opposing blocs. However, unless the abysmal lack of equity, the dramatic struggles for survival by whole continents and the indiscriminate abuse of nature are satisfactorily solved, they may give rise to heart-rending new contradictions capable of leading to fresh tragedies.

This is why it is important to avoid the "idolization" of the present situation and the uncritical view which sees that situation as the best of all possible worlds and identifies the end of the Cold War with "the end of history", as does Francis Fukuyama (1989), basing himself on some rather superficial reading of Hegel and Kojève. In any case, that post-history and post-conflict world seen by Fukuyama actually corresponds to the central countries and not to the periphery, which will have to continue to struggle with the "miseries of history" for quite a time to come.

The truth is that even after the end of the Cold War there are still great challenges for the human race which it is not in a position to solve in the present conditions: the frequently mentioned dissipation of the world's resources because of the desire to increase production and maximize profits

at all costs; the contradiction between the processes of internationalization of economic and financial activities and the absence of supranational regulations and controls; and the global dimension being assumed by the spread of poverty all point to the need for a new form of modernity able to include everyone, to halt the physical deterioration of the world, and to achieve a form of development acceptable in human terms.

The dramatic events of the Gulf War have shown that the end of the Cold War has not resulted in a peaceful and harmonious international situation, and that the aggressive political will of a developing country located in an economically strategic area and armed to the teeth, as in the case of Iraq, can go far beyond all its local effects and turn the invasion of a neighbouring country into a peril for the whole world by upsetting global balances.

The Gulf War has given a clear picture of the new international situation: the striking military pre-eminence of the United States, the reality and irresistibility of the post-Cold War consensus, and at the same time the need to base that consensus on a form of legitimation which is built on solid principles and is of universal scope: something which clearly points to the security mechanisms of the United Nations.

In this respect, the fact that –despite the continued use of force and the importance of private interests– the principles of universality are taking on fresh prominence as mechanisms of legitimation is of great importance for the shaping of a less conflictive international situation.

It also shows that there is still a long way to go in order to reach such a more desirable international situation. While not questioning the necessarily important role of the United States in world affairs, this “*pax cooperativa*” cannot be “*americana*” or of any other single power, but must reside in a form of truly shared authority capable of generating mechanisms for the guidance and solution of conflicts in the post-Cold War era, definitively doing away with double standards, anticipating disputes and eliminating their causes.

All this places at the centre of international life the issue of world government, not as a hegemonic project for the victors nor as a utopia for dreamers, but as something which it is perfectly possible to construct through regional and international bodies. This calls for the prevalence of an awareness of common destiny, interdependence and the need for consensus.

The eclipse of revolution must also be accompanied by the eclipse of counter-revolution and must give way to a revitalization of the idea of reform, of the value of gradual and step-by-step approaches and of changes involving the modification of existing societies rather than upheavals in entire systems.

In this field, too, Medina Echavarría was equally perceptive and clear-sighted when he noted that there has been a veritable intellectual interdiction of the idea of reform, particularly in Latin America. In this respect, he spoke of “the tabu maintained by many in recent years through the existence of ideologies which have identical presumptions of absolute truth, thus consigning to oblivion everything that has been due in past history to the patient building up of successive timely reforms which, although they may themselves lack the luminous halo of the great radical formulas, capable of mobilizing great efforts, nevertheless do not have to be paid for with big doses of sacrifice and suffering”.

For Medina Echavarría, the furthering of this trend in the developing countries should be based on the recognition, within a more universal market, of the right of all countries to seek and find

more favourable terms of trade, together with a situation in the field of multilateral credit and financial aid relations in which the non-economic conditions are reduced to the minimum.

If we look at the scenario which is taking shape, however, we see little room for a “material base” for reform and for an awareness of world interdependence.

As already noted, the great events of the years 1989 and 1990 did not have an automatically positive effect on North-South relations in the economic field; instead, they raised fresh uncertainties in view of the precarious situation and massive needs of the Eastern group of countries which are demanding aid.

The political strengthening of the United Nations has not been reflected in the strengthening of its economic and social dimension or in the creation of new multilateral mechanisms designed to secure more equitable treatment of the problems of the developing countries. This situation cannot be changed by matching forces, but only by the awareness on the part of the stronger countries that in the long run their future is inseparable from that of the weaker nations and that in a more interdependent world contagion with problems may be rapid and catastrophic.

A North which is made up of partners and not of adversaries can undoubtedly impose an irresistible peace on a South which is weak and racked by conflicts, but a peace which perpetuates or worsens the present situation would simply lead to fresh ruptures, fresh conflicts, and fresh destruction of human beings and nature.

In this respect, it is worth heeding the warning given by Ruffolo (1990), who, while recognizing the dynamic force of Western capitalism, points out the need for those in power (democracy) to play a more humanistic role, to bring back some balance into a unilaterally individualistic view, and to tackle the current decline in justice and social solidarity which could lead us to a regressive crisis capable of ending in fresh barbarism.

The option for this involves the extension of political reform to a global reform of international relations. The realization of such an option holding out the hope of advances towards harmonization of interests, channeling of conflicts in the right direction and shared solutions for the whole human race is thus a possibility and not an automatic trend.

If we had to define the central features of this reform, we would have to recognize the universal nature of democratic values, rights of the individual, the right to differ and respect for minorities; reject the concept of mankind as "Lords of Creation"; accept a new relation with everything that is not human (nature), which must be protected and cared for; and adopt a view in which the old ideological contradictions between the State and society, public and private affairs, regulation and the market, are replaced by non-unilateral pragmatic views which effectively combine the roles of all the actors in order to achieve just and non-exclusive solutions.

Against this background of shared values, the differences and contradictions which will naturally continue to exist can be dealt with in a manner more and more removed from a mentality of war and domination and fresh international relations can be established.

For Latin America, this is of vital importance. Never before had there been such a widespread advance in the region in the legitimation of democracy, respect for human rights, pluralism and alternation in power. Never before had there been such general acceptance of a culture of negotiation, pragmatism, agreements and shared responsibility in the generation and maintenance of non-authoritarian scenarios. Never before had international relations been viewed in terms so free from ideologies and so imbued with recognition of the inevitable interdependence of all nations.

At the same time, however, these tendencies exist side by side with a serious situation of regression in many fields that has led to the coining of the lamentably apt concept of the "lost decade" of the 1980s: greater concentration of wealth and greater inequality, an increase in exclusions and poverty, unsuitable and precarious forms of insertion in world activities, weakening of public institutions, misuse and plundering of natural resources, and industrial and technological obsolescence.

Even though not everything in the picture is negative, the crisis is nevertheless extremely serious, and returning to the path of development with equity raises enormous challenges (ECLAC, 1990). Of these, only a part can be solved by the Latin American countries alone, the other substantial part being related with the external environ-

ment (external debt, opening of international trade). As the ECLAC study cited above so correctly states: "for example, on the one hand it is necessary to strengthen democracy, while on the other countries are called on to adjust their economies, stabilize them, bring them into a world of intensive technological change, modernize their public sectors, increase savings, improve income distribution, introduce more austere consumption patterns, and moreover do all this within the context of environmentally sustainable development" (ECLAC, 1990, p. 12).

If, in the midst of the present precarious material conditions, it does not prove possible to generate the domestic forces needed in order for the democratic leaders and the citizens governed by them to undertake these tasks—which involve a project of far-reaching changes to be effected with the intervention of all concerned, diversified and not totalizing with regard to the real situation—then democracy will be increasingly precarious and fresh divisions, more or less civil wars and new authoritarian regimes could appear on the horizon.

The key to the future, then, lies in strengthening democracy, extending agreements and consensus, making shared sacrifices and efforts, and internalizing a post-Cold War culture.

However, this effort can only be crowned with success if the countries really learn to transcend national horizons and there is a common ambition to improve and transform the form of insertion of the region in the present-day world.

What is involved is a complex design, calling for the co-ordination of multiple impulses, but its historico-cultural base is extremely powerful, and today it can find, in the needs of the crisis and the legitimation of democracy, valid new reasons for its existence and for achieving what Medina Echavarría called "the reunification of the lost whole".

One author wondered whether austerity and scarcity might form a more favourable context for achieving consensus than abundance (Tedesco, 1990). Perhaps, in the paradoxical history of Latin America, the answer might be affirmative.

At all events, the impulses for national and regional reform can only be successful within the context of the global reform to which we already referred, which is why it is so vitally important to

follow up with close attention its possibilities of successful implementation. Unless we keep our eyes on the world as a whole, we are bound to be unparadoxably short-sighted in seeking to grasp what surrounds us more closely.

The opportunities opened up in this post-Cold War era are enormous, but there are also great dangers, as is shown by the central position of war and violence in the daily news and the dangers of disintegration, regression and balkanization in the processes of change. In order to build the future, we need something more than passive and short-sighted consensus: we need to generate a pluralistic, shared will to build our destiny in which all the people see themselves as participants.

In mid-1980, when the international situation seemed more than gloomy, Aníbal Pinto—reflecting on these same essays of Medina Echavarría—pointed out that the negative tone of the current situation should not prevent the reader from seeing their long-term validity and stressed the importance of doing everything that we can to attain a minimum model of peace (Pinto, 1981).

Today, what is possible is much closer to what is desirable: closer to a permanent programme of peace and development with justice which holds out not only the hope of survival but also a better life for all. What remains unchanged is the ethical, intellectual and practical duty to do everything that is possible and necessary to this end.

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