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**'STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS AND  
POLITICAL PARTIES: A CHALLENGE TO THE  
POLITICAL CLASS AND TO CITIZENS**

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**Introduction**

Humanity has always dreamt of earthly paradises. All peoples within their own cultural frames of reference or religious beliefs, place this paradise at the beginning of existence. In all cases, there is a common element: these dreams of human plenitude are **inclusive** in the extreme. The perfect description given by St Thomas Moor in his *Utopia* gives us a very approximate idea of just how much human beings want material abundance for all eliminating all the negative stress of our daily lives.

By contrast, as human beings we constantly experience harsh **reality**, full of **limitations and exclusions**. Reality shows us how difficult it is to achieve the dreamt-of plenitude, and just how far we are from Utopia.

The feasibility of making progress towards this dream of plenitude depends, to a large extent - as the men of the Enlightenment saw it - on technology, science and organisation. Globalisation is, in part, the proof. The problem with all this lies in the fact that science, technology and organisation are no less ambiguous now than they were yesterday. They can be used both to achieve more decent standards of living, and to establish new, ever more complex forms of domination and exclusion. Progress in itself carries no antidote against its abuse for negative purposes by human beings.

That is why it needs to be accompanied by a similar - or even greater - **progress in developing values, ethics, institutions and laws** which regulate, disseminate, protect and apply the achievements of scientific and technological progress.

It is clear that no historical process can be built or consolidated by negating the deepest essentials of the human condition; these need to be recognised, owned and channelled into politics - understood as a common area and basis for achieving the social self-realisation of human individuals.

**The ideal model and current threats**

Since the days of Ancient Greece, it has been an accepted fact that **democracy** is the **best form of government and social organisation**, even though throughout history we have seen regimes which, in the name of democracy, trampled the most basic elements of human dignity underfoot.

Despite the fact that there is virtually total consensus that democracy is the optimum political system for achieving the personal and social development of humanity, in recent years, democratic discourse has been a mere falling back on a very modest idea of democracy, limiting it to a set of guarantees with regard to authoritarian power, i.e. giving the word a purely negative content vis-à-vis political power which attacks the role of the people.

What positive content can we put into democracy when it is reduced to nothing more than formal minimum guarantees? This issue underpins the current debate in our search to establish democracy where it does not exist, consolidate it where it is in its infancy, and fine-tune it where it is already consolidated.

There is no question that democracy - as a system of rules enabling people to live together - is very closely linked to politics, in both philosophical and procedural terms. That is the source of today's scepticism, which stems precisely from the way that politics have been discredited and political parties and their leaders are despised. Here, the impact of 'image technology' and proliferating sources of under- and dis-information are turning homo sapiens into homo videns - as Sartori says -, which politically speaking means that we are in a society run by remote control, where television politics manipulate the contents of public opinion, and undermine one of the basic pillars of constitutional democratic legitimacy by simply removing or distancing the bulk of citizens from the problems which affect society as a whole.

While representative democracy has never been a mechanism adequate to the task of allowing the people to elect who should govern them, mainly thanks to the lack of genuine popular participation, its shortcomings today are even greater, since globalisation and post-modernism demand more and better democracy.

This assertion reflects a dynamic conception of democracy, which in the words of one American political scientist 'is an unfinished journey to prevent the concentration of superstructural powers belittling the role of the citizen'.

Both our Latin America and Europe need to assess democracy not merely as an election based political system, but as a way of life. On this basis we need to assess its achievements and its shortcomings, and try to draw up an agenda for the reforms required to strengthen and improve the development of democracy in both continents.

However, we also need to take account of the challenges posed by the revolution in computer and communications technology, which has led to the belief that political schemes and strategies should be processed via technological media, giving rise to new rules and amendments to the substance of politics, and thus allowing the massive development of 'scandal shows', pragmatic marketing and electronic populism.

All the foregoing indicates that we need to reconstruct democracy, by restoring it to what it originally was, via informational democracy in the shape of things like strengthening local politics, using the electronic media to increase involvement and horizontal communication developing 'symbolic politics', and mobilising the electorate on traditionally non-political issues which enjoy broad consensus, such as humanitarian causes and the protection of the environment. The fact that consensus of this kind exists is clear proof of the crisis of legitimacy being experienced by the nation state as such, the media framework within which politics now

takes place, the reduction of politics to personalised leadership - often combined with authoritarianism and demagoguery - illegal funding, the dragnet of political scandals and the divide between ethics and politics. All of this has led to growing disaffection towards parties, politicians and professional politics. However, this lack of confidence on the part of voters does not devalue democracy: what is happening is that they are making greater demands on the system.

Different political and ideological stances are not exempt from this uproar of adaptation or renewal, an uproar which is essential if we are to seek to provide a correct response to the new challenges facing our countries.

As long as doctrines remain our guiding lights, ideologies need to be invigorated; this involves identifying the problems which most concern and alarm humanity, and means providing concrete proposals instead of abstract, generalised discourse, so as to encourage humankind's struggle to tackle the problems. Ideologies are being renewed; they are not dying, as some people claim. And if ideologies change and renew themselves, politics can do so, too, and develop a fresh potential which will allow it to extend the range of its activities, the forms it takes and the alliances it makes.

This being so, political parties also need to renew themselves, making their structures more flexible, opening up to new political and social players, leaving their rancour and prejudices behind, so as to take a future-orientated attitude which will allow them to do the best for their respective nations. Dialogue, tolerance, respect for others, ethics and the use of peaceful means must all continue to be, more now than ever, the guidelines governing democratic political action.

### **The real situation of political institutions in Latin America**

The situation is delicate. Despite the progress made and the potential available, the region suffers from a serious risk of political ungovernability and social destructuring. How is this possible after twenty years of democratisation?

Firstly, because the task is no easy one: Latin Americans are being asked, simultaneously, to fine-tune internal markets, complete the construction of a nation or multi-nation states, push ahead with democratisation, generate greater social cohesion, build cultures of legality and answerability, and improve regional and international economic integration, all of it on the basis of difficult basic conditions, and in the context of a world where globalisation is weakening the powers of control exercised by nation states.

Secondly, because most **democratic governments have been incapable of pushing ahead with the reforms needed to bring about development, which is absolutely essential.** The economic and social return of Latin America's young democracies has, generally speaking, been mediocre, because the democratic political process has tended to be hi-jacked by elites who have no idea nor wish to go beyond accepted prescriptions and recipes.

The reforms undertaken in Latin America have not always been the right reforms, and in any case they have failed to achieve their objective: they have not altered the unfair inherited balances of power nor the deep-rooted inequality in which they result. International cooperation

bears a great deal of responsibility for all this, because it gave its blessing to and frequently financed these reforms, deeming them necessary and adequate.

We Latin Americans are democrats; but many of our compatriots are increasingly out of sympathy with the specific kinds of democracy in which they live, and there are even people prepared to accept autocratic regimes which will improve economic and social conditions.

The crisis of confidence in politics and politicians, hand in hand with the weakness of the institutions, leaves collective action deprived of structures to allow it to express itself, and spreads a dangerous attitude of 'every man for himself' throughout the social fabric.

Conceptual confusion now reigns in the collective mindset, because we were loudly proclaimed to be - a priori - democracies, market economies and constitutional states. As our citizens have no reason to be aware of the scope of these concepts - and international cooperation was incapable of explaining their scope, or simply did not want to - the result is that people do not support these slogans, and are open to allowing themselves to be swept away by a renewed upsurge of populist adventurism. There is a very real risk that after so much effort and so much suffering, very little will have been learnt. Latin America needs to face up to its own harsh reality: poverty, inequality, scarcely viable democracies, incomplete and very imperfect markets, an unimpressive degree of constitutional rule, high levels of corruption, etc. Latin America needs to do this by shaking the institutional foundations of its economy and its politics, the 'social fabric of public policies', which is where all these problems start.

Inequality, a character quite unexpected in some theatres of human activity and all too familiar in others, has become a genuine player in the drama of Latin American development. But few indeed are those who take on board the fact that we are talking about institutionalised inequality, mainly at an informal level, which spreads like a cancer throughout the social fabric, and prevents or at best makes it exceedingly difficult to achieve any democratic progress, market efficiency, effective government, a culture of legality, or, for all these reasons, social cohesion. This inequality reflects the unbalanced way in which power and wealth are distributed, itself the result of historical processes laden with conflict whose resolution never brought anything more than 'volatile stability'. The formal and informal institutional character of these solutions is not only unjust, it is also inefficient. **There will be no solid, lasting development without far-reaching institutional reform, nothing less than the institutional 'refounding' of Latin America.**

To understand just what I mean by 'institutional refounding', and avoid the trap of facile responses, we need to understand the nature and the roots of Latin American inequality. It is not in any sense a sub-product of failures in market economies, since those do not exist as such in virtually any of our countries; it is the direct outcome of the region's own history. Latin American can boast the world's highest inequality of income and wealth, a fact which minimises to the point of invisibility the value of all the region's development-related data added together. Latin America's per capita GDP and human development index are significantly higher than those of the other developing countries. However, Latin America's poverty and destitution levels correspond to far lower aggregate development levels. For example, if inequality was running at Asian levels, there would be an instant 25% cut in the number of Latin American poor. Furthermore, although Latin America as a whole has made progress in the last quarter of a century, there is no question that on aggregate, it has progressed less than the rest of the world.

The fact that even when there is prolonged growth, inequality is not reduced one whit, clearly points to the institutionalised nature of inequality. We are talking about much more than inequality of income and wealth: this is inequality in terms of capacities and opportunities. Our citizens are profoundly unequal. Firstly, in terms of gender and ethnic origin. Secondly, in terms of access to safety both from natural threats and from threats from crime or from developments in the social or labour spheres. Thirdly, they are unequal with regard to property rights - the assets of the poor are ill-defined, legally unprotected and generate capital only in informal and inefficient financial markets; they are unequal in terms of access to justice and to our republican administrations and their services, because the 'costs of uncertainty' borne by the poor in their relations with the apparatus of public administration condemns them to entrapment within the restrictions of economic informality. Fourthly, they are unequal in terms of access to education and health, because the indubitable progress made in these sectors nonetheless means the education and health which give people to access to well-paid jobs remain in the hands of the upper classes. Fifthly, they are unequal in terms of their access to business opportunities and productive jobs. Sixthly, they are politically unequal, because poverty and destitution mean that many of them see elections as a chance to sell an asset - namely their vote - while others participate not so much for reasons linked to political programmes as the need to get a job or secure an income. 'Patrimonialisation', sinecures, clientelism, corruption and even corporatism are informal institutions which all end up degrading political freedoms.

The high levels of inequality and poverty call into question the axiological foundation of all democracies, namely that no life is worth more than any other, and for that reason all of us have the same right to political involvement.

In Latin America **inequality is not the consequence but the cause of democracy's shortcomings**, and of the shortcomings of markets, the rule of law, effective governments and the continent's extreme social and political polarisation. If **the progressive reduction of poverty** is not made the **priority of the development agenda**, there is no question that whatever fresh programmes put forward will bring with them only fresh frustrations. That is why social policies alone are not an efficient weapon for combating inequality. Overcoming social inequalities affects the whole of public policy, and above all it demands that the balances of power and the rules of the game between the different social players be changed. In other words: institutional reform.

Latin America has not been able to profit properly from regional economic integration, partly because of the weakness and lack of trustworthiness of its internal institutions. Generally speaking, the basic institutional structures characteristic of a market economy are lacking. This is because the kind of institutions we currently do not protect, the assets of our citizens or do so only in a discriminatory fashion; the institutions protect arbitrary intervention by the public administration in economic life, turn the civil service into a source of gifts and sinecures, impose high costs on the legal setting up of businesses, fail to protect competitiveness within the internal market, frequently protect inefficient businesses, and fail to provide due protection for their workers and creditors when they have to leave the market. Economic regulations and supervision by agencies raise serious doubts as to the existence of impartiality and technical competence.

Economic integration needs to be based not only on supranational institutions, but on the existence of compatible, trustworthy national institutions. Simple free trade areas allow for enormous differences in terms of domestic, economic and legal institutions. But the construction

of a genuine common market, which is a much higher form of economic integration, cannot be achieved except by the European method of developing supranational law which is only effective when the national institutions are duly aligned to it. The principle of mutual recognition and the trust that Community law will be applied at national level would be simply unthinkable without this kind of consistency in institutional and legal terms.

Latin America's present political, economic and social 'informality' is the tumour at the heart of Latin American institutional life, and its metastasis makes for a sick democracy, weak markets and dis-integrated societies.

There is now a new, and dangerous, illusion in circulation: namely that the simple opening up of developed markets to competitive Latin American products will bring about a significant leap forward. Nobody disputes the fact that this opening up is needed; but it is equally indisputable that it needs to go hand-in-hand with writing off debts. To this end, we have to commit ourselves to severe institutional reform. Without such reform, Latin America's countries will be able to do no more than repeat the cycle of enclave development, with export profits being captured by economic elites who are not committed to developing national markets nor national production capacity. These elites will be able to continue resisting tax reform, alleging as their pretext the fact that governments are plagued by corruption or the abuse of taxes to pay cronies, despite the fact that the elites themselves enjoy excellent relations with the same governments.

There is a further and in historical terms new component which needs to be taken into account. Latin America has become highly urbanised. Over 75% of Latin Americans live in cities. Institutional reform needs to make the strengthening of local and regional governability one of its major goals. In the global world, cities and regions have acquired a new role as facilitators of and foreign houses for economic and social development. Competitiveness, productivity and solidarity depend not only on macroeconomic conditions and state policies, but also on action by local and regional government. The creation of environments favourable to developing local production capacities, attracting investment and establishing better links with global markets is something that is decided at national, regional and local level. Cities, networks of cities and regions are moving from being mainly service provider administrations into a governmental role providing leadership for the development of their respective territory. The external functions of the state are starting to go hand-in-hand with foreign diplomacy on the part of cities, a diplomacy sometimes capable of bringing about cross-border relations which, from the national point of view, are exceedingly problematic.

This need to focus on the issue of urban governability has to go hand-in-hand with transforming old-fashioned Latin American federalism into cooperative federalism. The old model institutionalised power balances between national and regional elites, which did nothing to help the integration of domestic markets. This institutionalisation provided stability, but only at the cost of massive economic inefficiency. In many countries today, progress is being made towards regionalising and/or revamping federalism.

So far we have briefly surveyed the Latin American situation, highlighting some of its principal problems and the sources of conflict that need to be eliminated. We will now proceed to propose a range of solutions, and consider the role which our Institutions can play.

### **What is to be done?**

Firstly, we must not delude ourselves into thinking that mere incremental changes in the current pattern of things is going to achieve anything much at all. The situation is risky and urgent, and cannot be treated with soothing ointments or more of the same, but a little bit better. The challenge of institutional reform that we are speaking about is not technical, but fundamentally political. Latin America has an excess of technical cooperation and a tremendous shortfall in political cooperation, which is what it most needs. Institutional reform is impossible without thoroughly overhauled political leadership and energy.

The Treaty institutionalising the Latin American Parliament states: '*CONVINCED that the integration of Latin America, the objective of other countries, is a historic process which needs to be speeded up and deepened*' establishing the following remit:

*'(a) encourage the integrated economic and social development of the Latin American community and strive to achieve as soon as possible the full economic, political and cultural integration of their peoples;*

*(b) to defend the understated sway of freedom, social justice, economic independence and the exercise of representative democracy, with strict adherence to the principles of non-intervention and the free self-determination of peoples;*

*(c) to monitor the strict respect of fundamental human rights, in order that in no Latin American country may they be infringed in any way which will detract from human dignity;.....'*

By simply complying with these foundational premises of the Latin American Parliament, we have found one possible solution to the problem of responding adequately to all the challenges posed by globalisation - essentially, the emergence of new social organisations which, interrelated at global level and stressing specific thematic areas, exercise very real influence on how new international regulations are to be formulated - and, simultaneously, the course of action which our organisations need to follow.

The first thing that has to be said is that nation states continue to be the major players in building more legitimate and civilised international relations. But only provided that they exercise their functions on the basis of recognising and respecting plurality, and of maintaining a balance between their own interests and global interests.

Secondly, our multilateral bodies have the remit of helping to develop global points of view, given that governability is only possible if governments, social movements or organisations and the private sector learn to coordinate with each other and to cooperate in taking decisions whose scope is worldwide. These multiple processes will, thanks to our work, simply transform the will to cooperate on compulsory global legal arrangements or provisions, increasingly based on shared visions and broader consensus. At the same time, we will need to boost the strengthening of the global - local relationship, given that many decisions taken at global level will require action or backup at local level, or vice versa (e.g. the Agendas XXI).

Cooperation is not possible unless we abandon some of the formal attributes of the nation state as currently understood. In order to be able to cooperate, countries need to accept limited and shared sovereignty. Existing examples show that transferring sovereignty to supranational

institutions makes it easier to take action and resolve problems, as well as influence at global level. Apart from one or two very specific exceptions, completely sovereign states which do not participate in supranational institutions have less ability to take action either domestically or abroad.

Such continental and global integration will only be possible if government structures are reorganised, both those of our bodies and of the Member States; this involves major innovation and greater institutional strength. It is undeniable that most traditionally domestic policies are increasingly part of a global context, e.g. security, environmental sustainability, preventive health, competitiveness, and development cooperation.

**The Latin American Parliament** has worked and continues to work incessantly to this end. However, our project for a **Latin American Community of Nations is progressing**, slowly but surely, towards achieving **institutionalisation** and acquiring the requisite instruments. Defending democracy and human rights, and laying the foundations for common framework legislation at continental level are real achievements of the 40 years of our Institution's existence.

### **What Europe can offer**

**Europe can offer a great deal to Latin America** in institutional terms. The social state founded on the rule of law and the social (or eco-social) market economy: these are genuinely European achievements. Their founding principle is rooted in the fact that on the one hand, free and efficient markets are not a phenomenon nature, but the fruit of hard historical and institutional building work; and on the other, forces unleashed by free and efficient markets may under no circumstances endanger social cohesion nor environmental sustainability. Europe's historic experience is that markets only combine efficiency and cohesion when they are not only acknowledged and guaranteed, but simultaneously regulated and limited. The rule of law also needs to apply to the economy. Without it what flourishes are not free markets, but mafias and the law of the jungle.

For that reason **European economic integration has been based not only on supranational institutions, but also on the existence of compatible, trustworthy national institutions.** Simple free-trade areas allow enormous differences to persist in terms of economic and domestic legal institutions. Building a genuine common or internal market (a very superior form of economic integration) can only be achieved by the European method, namely constructing a body of supranational law, which can only be effective when the national institutions are appropriately in line with it. The operability of the principle of mutual recognition and trust in applying Community law at national law would simply be impossible, without this kind of institutional and legal consistency. **When it comes to drawing up an innovative plan for political cooperation, Europe could take the initiative in working with the countries of Latin America.**

Secondly, Latin American countries need to be helped to put the reform of their formal and informal institutions and seeking to achieve a better balance between them at the very heart of their development agendas.



Various instruments could help in achieving these objectives: setting up shared databases on governability and development; training politicians and public managers in institutional reform; drawing up reports on the state of the national and regional institutions; drawing up national government profiles; supporting and indeed demanding that national institutional development strategies be drawn up to give concrete shape to commitments to strive towards good governance; targeting multi- and bilateral cooperation on achieving priority strategic objectives; and supporting the strengthening of the relevant national capacities. Simply to go on providing cooperation on institutional reform to countries which have no institutional development capacity or strategy is simply tantamount to providing fragmented, uncoordinated cooperation which for that very reason is part of the problem rather than a contribution to solving it. **Europe could commit itself to getting national and local capacity to manage institutional reform up and running.**

Thirdly, European cooperation should focus on the connection between strengthening democracy on the one hand, and economic and market integration with social inclusion on the other. In order to get democracy moving forward and preventing society from disintegrating, we need to create, in all our countries, a vast number of businesses and full-time, official jobs of a productive nature. The future of Latin America necessarily involves the drastic extension of its entrepreneurial capacity and the burgeoning and transformation of the middle classes which this would bring about. However, such a development is impossible without harsh institutional reform, which will not be achieved without conflict. The worst thing that could happen is for the orchestrated confusion between today's capitalism and the market economy to continue to develop. Institutional reform also involves calling a spade a spade. If this is not done, once again we will find men of goodwill possibly dazzled by groundless alternatives which will end up preventing opponents from acknowledging each other's existence and learning from one another.

Europe should be encouraging assessments of the quality of the entrepreneurial and production environment which currently exists in the various countries and major metropolitan areas of Latin America, with a view to highlighting the institutional gaps which the governments, businesses and civil and trade union bodies need to tackle and plug. Such assessments would highlight the profound structural link which exists between the institutionalisation of efficient markets, and the strengthening of democratic institutional structures. **Democratic governability, economic integration and social cohesion all form part of a single integrated strategy of institutional reform.**

Fourthly, Europe and Latin America need to commit their efforts once and for all on democratic governability and local and regional development. It is not a question of setting authority at local level against authority at state level, weakened as it is by global processes. The building of national or multinational states continues to be a fundamental priority of Latin American development, one which Europe needs to acknowledge and support. Development cannot do without local and regional players; but international economic insertion, the development of environments favourable to production and investment, guaranteed pluralism and cohesion are all impossible without the ongoing conversion of nation states into the executive managers of the interdependencies so characteristic of our age.

Decentralisation is a universal trend, which goes hand-in-hand with globalisation and the reform of the nation state which globalisation is imposing. Europe needs to be more resolute in its support for Latin America in this process. The fundamental tool will continue to be decentralised

cooperation, but cooperation opened up to federated regions and states, cooperation which seeks to incorporate the lessons learnt. In particular, Europe should support the setting up of a Latin American Local and Regional Authorities Network specifically dedicated to supporting and sharing local governability and development strategies, and supporting local capacities for creating environments favourable to the development of production.

Fifthly, Europe and Latin America need to commit themselves to reforming the United Nations, updating its Charter so that it can respond to current challenges, and reforming the Security Council to make it more representative and effective.

### **Political parties**

The main problem facing Latin America's political parties is that they are getting more and more like what people think they are. Whether they are fatalistic, presidentialistic, caudillistic, romantic, atavistic, pragmatic or whateveristic, our political parties are caught in a communications trap in which, do what they will, they always succeed in uniting public opinion against them. This is bad news for democracies, since if the political system loses its legitimacy, governability becomes a real problem. Opinion polls show that the institutions that Latin Americans least respect are parliaments, regional assemblies and local authorities, elected with the votes of those who today criticise them as corrupt and useless. The same opinion polls reveal that trust in political parties is, on average, minimal.

The crisis of the political parties links up with the crisis of the representative system itself and its inability to deal with the rising demands for social change which have resulted from an economic model whose cost in terms of fairness has been far too high. Representative democracy, when it finally arrived, was a victory for great swathes of the population, frustrated by their inability to get their rights recognised by means of 'direct democracy', whose paradigm at the time was the communist model. The nineteenth century, as a result of this collective need for representation, saw the flourishing of channels and spokesmen linking society and the state, namely political parties and parliaments, whose task was to represent society's general interests vis-à-vis the state, and, vis-à-vis the government's executive bodies, deal with the desire of citizens for specific changes.

In Latin America, the political parties emerged from polarisation surrounding ideological dilemmas such as feudalism, whether the state should be secular or confessional, whether education should be public or private. The origins of Latin American political parties were defined by the Church, the armed forces and private enterprise; in the twentieth century, extrinsic factors like Soviet expansion, the Cuban Revolution and international party political organisations came into play; at any given moment, social movements were a driving force feeding the updating of political parties' programmes. It is worth considering that today, over half of the political parties active in Latin America emerged from the region's efforts to consolidate democracy in the last 30 years (Alcántara, 1994).

Inherited impoverishment and the mistakes made by the new leaders when the republics emerged inured political parties to reprehensible practices like corruption and clientelism. It became standard practice to share out public 'social goods' like education, housing, health or job opportunities on the basis of electoral or even purely personal criteria. By the end of the twentieth century, following various civil wars and countless deaths, the general picture was

fundamentally exactly the same as at the start. Growing social exclusion, thanks to neoliberal economics, has sharpened the crisis of the region's representative system, and increased political exclusion, thus further nourishing popular mistrust of leaders, governments and parties.

Some of the media have played a key role in this loss of party political credibility, by using legitimate powers to monitor political life in order to demonise politics itself by means of scandals and sensationalism. While political parties have used things like clientelism to run political life, the sensationalist media have trivialised politics and converted it into a game of symbols and images whose sole purpose is to guarantee the largest possible number of viewers, listeners and readers. Much of the Latin American media today condemns, applauds, punishes, decides on, chooses and imposes political choices and leaders in a spirit of complete political irresponsibility; worse still, videopolitics - politics via the television set - fragments the political message itself. Today's market in televised images means that instead of content, let alone serious alternatives, all that people get are events, faces, bits of landscape, and emotion.

Latin America's political parties are themselves the biggest contributors to their growing discredit, thanks to the way in which they adopt postures which run counter to their own 'calling', namely to represent public interests; many of them are no more than electoral SMEs, and have completely abandoned Unamuno's maxim about the important thing being not to win (*vencer*) but to convince (*convencer*) ; Latin American parties win all right, but they convince no-one. Their approach has ended up turning them into voter-participation machines to elect governments whose legitimacy is measured in terms of their capacity to 'for things' rather than to advocate causes. The prevailing culture of political management has led to the prominence of individual leader figures who, like cowboys, gallop through the world - not undoing wrongs, like Don Quixote, but committing them.

The solution to the Latin American governability crisis therefore depends on the continent's political parties. But we cannot blame them for all the problems of governability in our continent, by crediting them with a damage-creating capacity which will not square with the widespread idea of their complete powerlessness. For example, it is perfectly clear that the parties and their spokesmen have acted as representatives of the provinces and regions vis-à-vis over-centralist and over-centralised states; they have also played the role of dispensers of public wealth, a role which the agencies of the state have proved incapable of performing with healthy criteria in terms of rationalisation and efficiency.

Saving the governability of Latin America means that we need to start with far-reaching political reforms; and the first item on the agenda is rehabilitating the continent's political parties, and especially restoring them to their proper role as channels of communication between society, the state and the market.

What we need is not *no* political parties, but stronger ones; what we need is not lots of parties, but strong parties. And this strength depends on their capacity and will to act and operate more transparently, put ideology back into their political activity, and redefine the social pact thanks to their own militancy.

However, the real definition of the role of Latin America's political parties begins and ends with the adoption of the new political system which, within a new network of regional governability,

will allow them to recover their ability to be political players and valid, legitimate and effective spokesmen for the state and for society.

The central element in the political reform that Latin America needs is overcoming the crisis of the representative system, which has seriously undermined the continent's governability and endangered Latin American democracy. Over and above ensuring that the ability of the traditional political players, like parties and parliaments, to act as spokesmen is reinforced, our new concept of what representativeness means must involve the acknowledgement of the global, social and geographical 'spaces' in which today's citizens, in the absence of political parties, are expressing their demands for change.

The struggle for global issues like human rights and the environment, participation in community scenarios like neighbourhood councils or parents' associations, and the steadily growing interest in the local problems of public services and 'citizen security' are part of this new framework. Only a clear, definitive institutional response will prevent 'street democracy', i.e. rioting protestors and violent political mass meetings becoming the new paradigm of 'governability' in our continent, as we have seen recently in Bolivia and Haiti, and saw in Argentina and Ecuador only a few years ago.

A semi-parliamentary type of regime offers us the chance of using institutional means such as the dissolution of parliaments or early elections to deal with political crises of this kind, which compromise not only short-term governability, but the permanence of institutional rule itself.

On a purely formal level, this reform needs to set itself a goal of replacing today's 'presidentialist' approach with a semi-parliamentary system, which will give parties and parliament back their leading role as the protagonists of political change, while redefining the terms of their relationship with the executive and guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary vis-à-vis the legislature and the executive. This reform will furthermore have to succeed in separating the tasks of representing the state, which can be exercised by a president, from the administrative responsibilities of a head of government elected by parliamentary majorities in parliament and in the cabinet: the president, as head of state, focused on the country's international representation, the management of the armed forces, domestic territorial equilibrium and monitoring the fulfilment of the major guidelines of the Development Plan, and as head of government, responsible for the administrative task of governing according to the international standards of what we know as 'good governance'.

The possibility of consolidating a new network of Latin American governability, including overhauled political parties, is severely constricted by the parties' own *caudillista* tendencies; *caudillismo* is the cause and consequence of the strongly presidentialist character of our political systems. Latin American presidentialism is a poor-quality copy of the USA's: in the north, it operates within a federal governmental structure which democratically counterbalances the central authority of Washington, all under the jurisprudential care of a Supreme Court which guarantees the national consistency of all the institutions, while Latin American presidentialism is an unhealthy mixture of *caudillismo*, political centralism and geographical exclusion.

Europe's contribution, on the basis of its long and successful experience of parliamentary systems, would be of the greatest value to Latin America. Many of our political parties belong to international party political groupings which are strongly supported by their European members,

or are advised by them. Drawing up a systematic plan for training leaders, and devising and holding awareness-raising courses on the advantages of thinking about a new system of political representation could result in a major step towards solving Latin America's chronic problems and, above all, reducing the risks threatening democratic life on this continent.

## Conclusion

The burning need for a democracy which, thanks to its institutional organisation, guarantees all citizens universal rights, is something we cannot refuse to acknowledge. It is our duty, and there is no alternative. The challenge is one that only we can take up, so let us take sovereignty back into our hands: There is no *deus ex machina* coming to solve the problem for us. We need to dare to do it ourselves. We need to reclaim our Utopia. **We need to try to involve all our citizens in a 'dream' which involves the length and breadth of both our continents. WE NEED TO BE PARLIAMENTARY POLITICIANS .**

Let me end by quoting a speech made by the first President of the Latin American Parliament, my compatriot Luis León, who said in Lima (Peru) in 1964: *I am here to take up the challenge of a fresh round in the shared struggles of our Latin American homeland for democracy, integration, emancipation and peace.*

*America needs the living, not the dead. History is made by people who are free, healthy and capable of thought; for that reason we condemn terrorism ...*

*We must integrate! Let us go out to the man in the street and explain where the Latin American Parliament is going. Let us go into trade union meetings and explain to our workers that integration means adequate wages. Let us go to our business entrepreneurs and tell them that there are such things as ethical profits, if they are humanised and directed towards cementing social solidarity. Let us tell our churches, all our churches, whichever churches they are, that integration needs the spiritual help of love for one's neighbour ...*

*We need to keep on working, regardless of victories or defeats. What is important is how we fight. If we tackle the struggle on a sound moral basis, our history will be an ethical one through and through.'*