

LATIN AMERICA DURING THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

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Abstract: The authors are considering the complex socio-political and economic changes that occurred in Latin America during the first two decades of the 21st century. The starting hypothesis is that during this period, significant internal changes took place within the framework of Latin American regionalism, as well as with the region's relations with the world. All of these changes developed in accordance with the theory of complex interdependence and open regionalism that relies on neoliberal reforms. Furthermore, the authors have identified external variables that had directly influenced Latin American internal economic, political, and social development. The ideological breakup of the political consensus that existed in this region during the 1990s led to the emergence of new models of integration, cooperation with other blocs in the world, but also to the appearance of the first Latin American emerging power (Brazil). However, the most significant changes occurred in South America, where non-traditional political regimes, including the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, came to power at the beginning of the 21st century. All these regimes were defined as politically and economically anti-neoliberal but trying to adopt new state measures in order to solve deep social crises that convulsed the basis of Latin American democracy. When analyzing these events, the authors define two periods, taking into consideration the election results for evaluating the ideological changes and their consequences. The conclusion is that, at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, and after the end of the election cycles in 15 countries of the region, there is a relatively balanced division of power between the progressive so-called leftist regimes and the rightist ones, which were in the majority in the second decade of the 21st century.

Keywords: Latin America, South America, economic and political transition, social crisis, ideological division, integration, new international position.

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SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In order to understand socio-political and economic development tendencies of Latin America and evaluate the first two decades of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to consider internal causes but also external ones derived from transformations that occurred in the frame of the global scenario. The use of the comparative and analytical method would permit us to obtain not only the objective knowledge about the transformations that have taken place in that part of the world during this period but also a better understanding of the complex regional reality and its consequences.

There is no doubt that the end of bipolarity in international relations and the collapse of the corresponding international structure and previously functioning order, including their main actors and dominant ideologies, have caused numerous debates about the challenges of the new international order. In practice, the redefinition of the strategic hegemonies from the previous era and the new political scenario mostly based on neoliberal doctrine have been dominant tendencies. In parallel, national, regional, and global international security models have been in the process of redefinition, including the relativization of the traditional concept of sovereignty (Pajović 2010).

Following the analysis of these changes, it is possible to conclude that the international relations system has been transformed into one of a multipolar structure, division of power, new security models, sources, and individual or group potentials. This phenomenon has caused not only different systemic and structural changes but also the new multidimensional impact, both on global and regional levels. Our analysis indicates that this phenomenon is also the result of a complex interdependence that has opened new spaces for the emergence and formation of non-traditional power centers. The appearance of new emerging hegemonic actors with strategic capacity and growing economic-financial potentials has led to the formation of new alliances, regional and global models of cooperation and integration, but also rivalries in various parts of the world. In addition, this process is differentiated on subregional, regional, interregional or global levels and based on technological advances, transnationalization of the economy, commerce and socio-political, ideological and cultural changes. However, all these changes resulted from numerous dynamics embraced by globalization and processes, combined therein (Sanauja 2007).

In short, this phenomenon could also be directly linked to the solution of regional crisis outbreaks, military actions initiated in that direction, and the international geoeconomic positioning of a country or a region. Accordingly, a new international panorama has been oscillating between unipolarity and multipolarity, or combining both concepts into a new one named unimultipolarity (Phillips 2017, 82-94). The authors of this study consider that the

concept of uni-multipolarity would be a flexible framework used by the only global superpower of a post bipolar system of international relations in order to continue to maintain a strategy of defending or establishing its hegemony in different parts of the world. In addition, the practice has also shown that in specific situations and occasionally this global power needs the cooperation of other western actors.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that the significance of the West has changed and is currently understood as one of the various international communities composed of a group of countries with different objectives in their foreign policy, societies and governance based on democratic-liberal principles and neoliberal capitalist economies. After the fall of bipolarity, space was opened for the emergence of different types of rivalry or even conflicts within the West. In fact, this new structure of the West is no longer so unified in the age of globalization, given the existence of various conflicts, differences, discrepancies, disputes, economic-commercial and financial rivalry, political-social and cultural hegemonistic tendencies (Pajović 2015, 114-131).

This issue has generated significant discussions about the potential and ideological-political, economic and cultural character of the US as the only superpower from a previous historical period but with global activity. Meanwhile, also, in Latin America, there have been different opinions, positions and important analysis. For example, there is a consideration that the world is in the process of deep transformations, moving between globalization and de-globalization, the US and other emerging global leaders trying to lead the so-called “post-Western world.” In the report of the Center for Analysis and Dissemination of Paraguayan Economy (CADEP), there is also a consideration of the growing discrepancy between the existing order with many problems in functioning and another one in a forming process but challenging its power division and especially its leadership positions.

TRANSFORMED LATIN AMERICA CHALLENGES THE 21ST CENTURY

The initial hypothesis about the socio-political and economic development of Latin America, in the first two decades of the 21st century, is based on the evidence that after the neoliberal reform undertaken during the last two decades of the 20th century, the manifested ideological fragmentation caused significant changes in Latin American regionalism. In addition, the authors’ suggestion is to understand the concept of Latin American regionalism as a common strategy for the launching of many subregional and regional initiatives in the field of cooperation and integration. This trend was based on political affinity, geographic proximity, the same or very similar models of economic and social developments,

religious, cultural and linguistic similarities. Finally, our initial hypothesis is completed by the statement that the complex interdependence theory is the best theoretical framework for studying this phenomenon.

In accordance with the above-explained elements of our main hypothesis, it is necessary to underline that internal and external variables have had a direct influence on the course and the content of development processes in Latin America. In reality, the connection between these two variables and their interactions permitted us to identify different ideological trends that conditioned the socio-political and economic reconfiguration of Latin America directly at the beginning of the 21st century. Accordingly, it was possible to make a periodization of the development of Latin American regionalism into two phases: the first, influenced by the neoliberal school and, the second, as a result of the reaction of Latin American societies to the negative consequences of neoliberal economic reform. In any case, the sociopolitical and economic situation and trends in the region have to be studied keeping in mind the impacts of these consequences on further deepening of social disparities, the strengthening of social tensions, and the increasing of the overall poverty.

There is no doubt that the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century was the new and favourable period for intensive socio-political development and diversification of regional cooperation and integration. The concept of open regionalism was adopted as the strategy for democratic and economic transition with the parallel restructuring of national and regional agendas to achieve a more pragmatic and effective insertion into a system of international relations. High level of complex interdependence, manifested within the framework of the new open Latin-American regionalism, has substantially modified its political, economic, social, financial, scientific and technological, environmental, cultural or educational reality. For example, Professor Helio Jaguaribe, a internationally recognized Brazilian expert in international relations, insisted in his reflections about the place of Latin America in the era of globalization that the new model of integration is the only possible instrument for Latin American countries to compensate for the hegemonistic effects of globalization and unilateral aspirations of the US government. According to Jaguaribe, Latin American regionalism has to be based on regional and subregional integration models. However, he underlined that the actual situation, the potential and the perspectives of each country must be taken into consideration due to profound differences existing between South America, Mexico or Central America and the Caribbean. Certainly, he underlined that these new tendencies would probably lead to the fragmentation within the framework of the traditional Latin American regionalism, indicating that the future of South America will depend on the potential for a stable and reliable strategic alliance between Brazil and Argentina (Jaguaribe 2006). This prediction of future

development trends in Latin America emphasizes a dynamic differentiation on the subregional level, which would inevitably lead to the strengthening of interregional cooperation. Starting from this analysis and prediction, we believe that it would be necessary to follow the modifications of the development corridors in the region and, in particular, in South America, where IIRSA (The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America) was established in 2000 as the first model of integration in the field of physical infrastructure.

Anyhow, we could add that this is also a period when numerous cooperation and integration agreements have been signed in the field of trade liberalization, together with new economic, political and social integration projects. Within this process, it was also possible to identify some unique experiences, such as the participation of one country in various regional or subregional integration initiatives and, in parallel, in those initiated with other regions in the world. For example, during that period, Mexico concluded a record of 50 Free Trade Agreements, including countries from three different continents (America, Asia, Europe), thus taking second place on the global level in this activity. These agreements are very important for the Mexican economy - 11th largest in the world, according to the Forbes Report Best Countries for Business in 2019 - because of reducing barriers to trade, tariffs and import quotas. Among the most important are: NAFTA (now transformed into USMCA); the Treaty of Transpacific Association; European Union - Mexico Trade Agreement; EFTA Free Trade Agreement; Mexico - Central America Free Trade Agreement; The Pacific Alliance; Japan-Mexico Economic Partnership Agreement; Mexico-Israel Free Trade Agreement, etc.

In conclusion, we can detect this very dynamic geoeconomic redesign of Latin America to be understood and analyzed as a multilevel process that encompasses different subregional, regional and inter-regional interactions, as well as those established with other regions or countries outside of Latin America. This process was based on the strict implementation of the neoliberal doctrine, controlled initially by the new and redefined state institutions with their remarkably reduced responsibilities during constitutional reforms undertaken as an important element of the democratic transition that occurred in the 1990s of the last century. In fact, the neoliberal redefinition of the welfare state model – which existed in Latin America previously - restricted quite numerous state prerogatives and instruments. Consequently, in this transitional period, there emerged new sociopolitical and economic actors, among which we emphasized the significance of non-state (non-governmental) actors, such as specialized agencies and institutes, banks, national and transnational companies, private foundations, universities, etc.

On the other side, nearly all of these integration initiatives were based on the need to formulate, adopt, promote and implement a new development model for Latin American countries, according to the suggestions of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), presented in the following very important documents: Transformation of Production and More Equitable Distribution (1990), Sustainable Development: Production Transformation (1991) and Open Regionalism in Latin America – Economic Integration in the Service of Production Transformation and More Equitable Distribution (1994). ECLAC explained this concept as the result of the new integration processes arisen from the increasing complex interdependence and the political affinity between Latin American countries. This trend was also stimulated by their economic similarities, the complementary level of economic development, market forces and by a series of specific intergovernmental agreements aiming at the establishment of various free zones throughout Latin America. Anyhow, it is also necessary to emphasize that this process was oriented to harmonize various regional interdependencies that resulted from trade liberalization and the implementation of the free market economy model. This observation points to the fact that open regionalism differs from the process of trade liberalization and the indiscriminate export promotion, having in mind that it contains integration mechanisms based on geographic advantages (proximity) and cultural unity (Klaveren 2018). This analytical framework made it possible to study the process of redefinition of the already existing integrative models in the region as well as the new ones, which were launched after the neoliberal reform. Additionally, it is important to note that the concept of open regionalism and the open market economy model appeared at the beginning of the 1990s when ECLAC tried to explain and direct integration processes conceptually in the light of NAFTA, the transformation of the Andean Pact into the Andean Community of Nations, MERCOSUR and individual experiences in the application of the neoliberal policy of trade liberalization.

During this period, a new geoeconomic structure was established, in accordance with the priorities of economic development, and subregional and regional integration in Latin America. The most significant representatives of this new development cycle were the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) or, for example, the Ibero-American Community of Nations (CIN) and Association of Caribbean States (ACS). Later, in 2001, the Bolivarian Alternative for Our America (ALBA) was founded. In any case, each of these initiatives introduced very important geoeconomic, political and ideological transformations of great impact both on a regional and international scope. It is also important to indicate that these integration initiatives were of the subregional and regional types, but some of them included the entire

American continent, or even linking Latin America with the Iberian Peninsula (Pajović 2008, 95-103).

For example, when analyzing the FTA in terms of the traditional integration theory, it is observable that it includes only trade liberalization and the methods and instruments for further flexibilization of the so-called trade-related issues. On the other hand, the FTA excluded any development planning or a strategy proceeding directly to tariff dismantling without a proper transitional adjustment period or an announcement of another developmental stage in order to achieve superior forms of integration. In summary, the analysis of the content of the FTAs shows definitely the predominance of commercial issues and the absence of any concern or measure for the promotion of equity. The authors of this study believe that this FTA dominant feature proposed by the US has caused resentment and indignation in Latin America, especially in those countries where progressive regimes have been in power.²

Furthermore, the analysis shows that this kind of project is characterized by an evident inequality between the US and Latin American volume of the economy and, especially, the technological capacities. According to Professor María de Monserrat Llairó - from the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the University of Buenos Aires - the existing great asymmetry among North American and Latin American companies in the field of financial resources, technological level of development and management capacity would unavoidably lead to “exclusionary specialization”. In practice, this situation would give to North American companies full control and command over all sectors of the added value, leaving a small space for South American companies as raw material and unprocessed agricultural products suppliers. Professor Llairó concluded that the FTA project is undoubtedly of a neoliberal character, which provides access of better and cheap North American products to the Latin American consumer society.

Finally, in regards to the new integration models that appeared in the Latin American region, we could underline that the most important of those were the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Despite the differences existing between the member countries, it was obvious that the main objective was the strengthening of political cooperation on the governmental level in order to increase the Latin American negotiating position and power vis-à-vis its external partners (Falomir

² In Latin American political history the term progressive could be used to determine those political regimes which implemented new economic, social, educational and cultural measures in order to achieve faster economic and social development and incorporation of marginalized sectors of societies into political, economic, social and cultural emancipation. These regimes were of different ideological origins.

Lockhart 2013). It was a new strategy for a more successful international positioning and a more autonomous status in globalization (López-Aranda 2018). Nevertheless, we have to remember that the regulation of the trade that had the central role in the concept of traditional Latin American regionalism - during the so-called postliberal phase - is presented now as secondary, but not ignored since it has been an important element of integration. In addition, it is necessary to underline that the exclusion of the US and Canada from this process permits us to consider that the intention of the new Latin American regionalism is an alternative to the hemispheric regionalism launched by the US. Those integrative initiatives after the collapse of negotiations within the FTA initiated by the US have to be understood as a return to the traditional regional integration schemes, especially MERCOSUR - as a pillar of the entire integration network in Latin America and, in particular, in South America.

When considering the external variables that influenced and conditioned the overall development of Latin America during this period, it should be emphasized that progressive interaction between external and internal variables have produced various consequences and results in economic, political, commercial, technological, educational and cultural spheres. In this context, several important facts should be taken into consideration. Firstly, we have to note that the international position of Latin America in the first decade of the 21st century was remarkably strengthened by a successful economic and political transition, the implementation of a new development model that was compatible with the demands of globalization, including a high level of internationalization in the banking sector, production and trading strategies. In short, these structural changes were followed by increasing and diversifying of subregional, regional and inter-regional integration (Riggirozzi & Tussie 2012). Obviously, all these changes have made Latin America an increasingly attractive partner for cooperation and foreign investments. Secondly, there are several new and very important characteristics when analyzing Latin America's international position: the emergence of new political and economic partners, redefinition of relations with traditional hegemonic centers in the world, and the institutionalization of the new forms of cooperation with other economic and political blocs. The results of these dynamic processes are non-traditional alliances such as BRICS, G20, IBAS (Forum of Dialogue - India, Brazil and South Africa), the Asia-Pacific region, APEC, China, the European Union, etc.

It has to be said that there are opinions about China as one of the most relevant commercial and strategic partners of Latin America. This fact is relatively new and has caused a rivalry with the US and the EU by disrupting their global interests in this part of the world. The case of China is very special due to some new forms of cooperation, presence and influence. The principal fields of cooperation are the energy sector, copper, agriculture and food products and

commodities in general. The Chinese strategy towards Latin American countries also includes the establishment of a joint oil company with Venezuela, a significant number of investments in different projects in Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean countries. In addition, at the beginning of 2004, China became one of the major trading partners of MERCOSUR. On the other side, China notably increased imports from Latin America by 600%, and investments to nearly a billion dollars per year (Pajović 2013).

To recapitulate, China also sent some twenty military missions to several Latin American countries, demonstrating its intention to include this region in the Chinese global security and defense strategy even though Latin America is not the priority of the Belt and Road Initiative (2013). The main regional partners have been Brazil, Venezuela and Bolivia. Recently, and due to its geographic position, Suriname also appeared as a Chinese partner for the launching of satellites and spacecraft. Parallel to all these initiatives, it is important to underline that China continues steadily to maintain its presence in Cuba having a base for observing the US. In any case, Cuba has become the Chinese most important strategic partner in the Caribbean subregion. Finally, according to some experts in Latin American politics, the Chinese presence in this part of the world, despite its extremely pragmatic strategy, will primarily depend on the political situation in the region and especially on the leftist and populist regimes.

Other significant external variables with differentiated influences, reduced to some fields of cooperation and parts of the Latin American territory, represent Russia, Japan, South Korea, India, Turkey and, recently, Africa. Each of these countries has progressively strengthened its influence in specific areas of cooperation and a country or a subregion within Latin America. In conclusion, it can be stated that two particularly important consequences of the interactions between internal and external variables are the new development model of Latin American regionalism and the dynamic transformation of Brazil into an emerging power with global projections and activities. It is also the first time in the history of international relations that a Latin American country has emerged with broader global interests and pretensions.

The case of Brazil should be analyzed separately because, in this period, it has been the only Latin American country which has manifested sufficient potential strategy for activities and operations as a state with a status of a newly emerging power, being, at the same time, the center of regional hegemony, but with global interests and aspirations. This transformation process took place in the 1990s, and especially in the first decade of the 21st century. During this period, Brazil gained dominance and leadership in the Latin American region, and especially in South America. Brazil's domination over the entire region was

often faced with challenges by other regional actors, such as Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, the US and some alliances, but not always with similar ambitions.

Starting with January 2003 and during the two mandates of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil successfully implemented the strategy of establishing close cooperation with Africa. The strategic partnership established with Africa's states allowed Brazil to achieve a significant scope of cooperation in the fields of technology, energy, direct investments, as well as to provide help and knowledge to reduce poverty and hunger on this continent. Nevertheless, cultural ties were very important, having in mind the historical heritage established during colonial times. In addition, almost one half of Brazilians are of African descent, from slaves imported from Africa. African culture is a significant and organic part of Brazilian culture and identity: music, dance and the mix of religions and rituals, languages, etc. Finally, this historical heritage and close links have been additionally strengthened and diversified by the institutionalization of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa – CPLP) - with the following members: Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and East Timor.

To conclude, the successful and progressive international positioning of Brazil is based on a significant human and territorial potential, a huge diversity of natural resources, energy potentials, experience in industrial production and distribution of biofuels, important technological advance and the possession of the last remaining rainforest (ecopower). During this period, the main characteristics of the accelerated economic and technological development of Brazil were its important advances in these fields and their application into production. The rapid development of the aircraft industry should also be noted, placing it among the most developed in the world. This is followed by the automobile, computer-IT and complex electrical and electronic appliance industries.

On the other side, the international position of Brazil is different in comparison to Russia, India or China, members of BRICS, with which it is often compared. There is no doubt that Brazil has the significant geopolitical and geoeconomic advantages of being surrounded by weaker and smaller states with common historical heritage from the colonial period, of having a developing liberal democracy in a stable phase, being in the vicinity of the US, and not being exhausted by wars, being an impressive global exporter, the leading MERCOSUR country, a member of the G-20 (developing countries), a member of BRICS, yet, also facing great problems in the domain of microeconomic reforms, the creation of a more adequate tax system and equalization, and trying to increase the annual growth (Pajović & Ivanović 2011).

THE CYCLE OF CRISIS OF THE SO-CALLED NEW LEFT AND THE RETURN OF THE RIGHTIST PARTIES TO POWER IN LATIN AMERICA

As it was explained, solving social problems and, especially poverty, has become a multidimensional challenge for new regimes. However, it was on their agenda as a priority not only to assure and assist with basic living resources to a significant part of the population but also, even more importantly, the objective was to resolve the historical phenomenon of socio-economic marginalization and ethno-linguistic discrimination (Roth/Manke 2018). When analyzing the undertaken reform measures in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile or Argentina, it is observable that the so-called moderate leftist governments (Brazil, Chile, Argentina) were able to achieve and maintain a more stable and sustainable model of development than more radical and revolutionary regimes in Venezuela, or the government in Bolivia led by an indigenous leader. Moderate governments adopted economic and financial measures that generated solid economic growth, reducing poverty and inequality. These innovative social programs, although fiscally difficult to sustain, were based on the respect of the fundamental principles of the market economy and liberal democracy. In contrast to these experiences are the more radical and revolutionary regimes in power, led by Chaves and Morales. The strategy of the Bolivarian Revolution, for example, was to strengthen and expand state interventionism, with parallel inclusion of the principle of popular participation and direct democracy. Despite some short term and very important economic and social successes, this revolutionary strategy, renamed as the 21st Century Socialism, provoked severe internal and external conflicts, completely ignoring traditional democratic principles and, finally falling into a deep crisis because of the inability of its institutions to ensure the economic and institutional sustainability of the model. In the case of Bolivia, the regime managed to provide relatively high rates of economic growth, employment, modernization, especially in rural areas, inhabited by the indigenous population. Nevertheless, it fell into a deep constitutional crisis due to electoral manipulation and the unconstitutional running for office by the former president for the third time.

Some Latin American political analysts say that, by the end of President Barack Obama's second term, the leftist regimes in that part of the world began to lose elections or fall into a deep crisis (Espejel Pineda 2018, 69-84). In parallel, almost all integrational models established at that time by left-wing governments began to show signs of lagging and stagnation (UNASUR, CELAC and ALBA). On the other hand, new models of integration inspired anew by neo-liberalism have emerged: the Pacific Alliance, founded by Mexico, Columbia, Peru and Chile. This is how the right-wing regimes regained power, using leftist failures and

popular resentment due to economic downturns, resulting partly from the ripple effects of the global financial crisis, as well as big and politicized corruption scandals, political influence of powerful ultraconservative circles and movements, expanding influence of financial capital and the US diplomatic support and aid to the right-wing parties (Rossi 2017). Other factors also accelerated this process, such as the military coup in Honduras (2009), the parliamentary coup d'état against President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay (2012) or, more recently, the one against the Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff (2016). After the impeachment process, Vice President Michel Temer took power in 2016, and the extreme right-wing conservative and Senator Jair Bolsonaro became the President of Brazil in 2018. Meanwhile, in 2015, the Peronists lost power through elections after 12 years in power, and a new political stage in Argentina was initiated by Mauricio Macri, the leader of the right-wing parties and movements. In Chile, the conservative Sebastián Piñera came to power after the socialist President Michelle Bachelet in 2017. Finally, in November 2019, Evo Morales, the first indigenous president in the political history of Bolivia and the last survivor of South American leftist socio-political and economic transformation, was forced to leave the country after disputed elections and the outbreaks of violence and conflicts in the country.

In order to explain this profound political change in Latin America, analysts have pointed to several facts that possibly could have had an impact on this phenomenon. Here are some of them that are important and should be taken into consideration: the election of Donald Trump in the US and a dose of fear and uncertainty that this event caused in Latin America (Yákovlev 2017), the strengthening of right-wing populism and neo-nationalism in Europe, the increasing influence of evangelical Christian communities in Latin America and especially in Brazil, where those numerous religious communities are strongly conservative and socially very influential, as well as the Venezuelan crisis with all its consequences in the field of migrations, political instability of the region, or even the danger of a foreign military intervention.

Furthermore, in 2017 all right-wing governments in Latin America and the Caribbean (12) established the so-called Lima Group in Peru adopting a declaration about a “rupture” of the “democratic order” and “violation of human rights” in Venezuela. The Lima Group focused exclusively on Venezuela and its internal problems, its financial crisis, social tensions in the society, increasing poverty, food and medication shortages, the international consequences of this crisis, taking into consideration the fact that China, Russia, Turkey and Iran are significant partners of this revolutionary regime. Besides, the Lima Group is ignoring other countries in the region where human rights and democracy are threatened, some of them being members of the group and governed by right-wing parties. To summarize, the US is not officially part of the group, but the

US has high level representatives attending nearly all of its meetings. In any case, the establishment of this alliance of right-wing parties in power indicates a strengthening of conservatism, further isolation of Cuba, and the increasing of the US influence on political movements in Latin America.

To directly influence the political tendencies in South America, mostly right-wing governments have recently formed a group called Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (Prosur). The group was founded by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, and Peru, and it represents essentially the anti-UNASUR strategy, accusing it of supporting and being too sympathetic to the revolutionary government in Venezuela. Taking into account the fact that the right-wing neo-liberal ideology is again present in the economic integration network in this region, with the establishment of the Pacific Alliance, one can expect an alignment and coordination of activities of the Lima, Prosur and Pacific Alliance groups, which would further strengthen the influence of this ideology.

It is well known that the Pacific Alliance is a model of regional integration launched in 2011 by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. The main objectives are to build a deeply integrated system that would provide free movement of goods, services, resources and people. But even more important is the aim to become a platform for political articulation, economic and commercial integration and projection into the world, with the emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region. Various prominent experts on Latin American integration issues believe that this group has initiated its activities successfully and very pragmatically, bringing Latin American regionalism back into the fragmentation phase due to the ideological differences regarding the model of economic development, but also of integration itself (Godoy López 2019, 85-98).

It is evident that the political mosaic of Latin America was ideologically enriched with the creation of the Puebla Group in July 2019. This group emerged to oppose, from the perspective of a regional unit, the neoliberal governments that took over in Latin America. Its objectives are to lead and bring together regional progressive thinkers, parties or movements, including the attitudes and opinions of the Sao Paulo Forum and UNASUR. In fact, the Puebla Group opposes neoliberalism by blaming it for the lack of growth, more equitable distribution of GDP, the increasing of social inequalities, the insisting on individualism and the concentration of wealth in very limited social circles. Therefore, no adequate answer could be given to the demands of the wider and poor sections of society. Historically, the Sao Paulo Forum (FSP) represents a very important and positivist incentive in the domain of organizing the Left in Latin America. In fact, the FSP is the conference of leftist political parties, organizations and movements from Latin America and the Caribbean. It was launched by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) in 1990. At that time, the objective

was to debate the challenges of the new international scenario after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and also the consequences of the implementation of neoliberal policies adopted by the right-wing governments in the region.

FINAL REMARKS

Taking all these facts into consideration, we may conclude that the political panorama of Latin America is significantly more complicated at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century than in the previous two, which we have analyzed in this paper. The election results showed that in Latin America the regimes with different ideological orientations do coexist, which inevitably leads to a reduction in political affinities, a consensus regarding the economic development and integration models, but also problems in security issues in the region. Even though right-wing political forces are in power in the majority of Latin American countries - led by Brazil's extreme-rightist President Jair Bolsonaro - it is visible that this political block is not homogeneous due to the existing differences: extreme right, right and center-right parties. Certain differences between right-wing governments have materialized regarding many issues, particularly in foreign policy questions: the crisis in Venezuela and the possibility of a foreign military intervention taking place, the relations with the US and the further strengthening of its presence in Latin America, China as one of the most important strategic partners of Latin America and the political approach and attitudes towards the crisis hotspots in the world. In terms of internal politics, there are considerable differences, and let us just state that during the deep social crisis in Chile, the conservative President Sebastián Piñera was forced to reach a consensus in the Parliament with all political parties over constitutional changes that would guarantee a new social policy. In short, all right-wing governments will face, as their main obstacle, the increasing social dissatisfaction and differences which resulted from the application of the neoliberal model of development.

On the other side, the political changes in Mexico and Argentina, two very significant states in the region, were decisive for the strengthening of the so-called Latin American Left. No doubt it was an incentive for further promotion of progressive ideas at a time when the neoliberal model has already entered a crisis, demonstrating also its economic stagnation. With regard to Mexico and Argentina, we must point out that these two countries are also influential in the broader international context, given the fact that they are G20 members, Mexico is the 15th economy in the world and Argentina, despite the crisis, being the third economy in the region, is ranked 26th in the world. In addition, Mexico has free trade agreements with the US and Canada, the EU and 50 other countries in the world, while Argentina is the only member of MERCOSUR that does not belong

to the right. The ideological bloc also includes Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama, where left-wing parties are in power, which will surely strengthen progressive initiatives in Latin America.

In conclusion, the first two decades of the 21st century showed a more heterogeneous and fragmented political structure of Latin America (Yákovlev 2016). During this period, we had a turn to the left and another to the right, but the complicated and antagonistic political-ideological range has endured. Considering ideologies of the political parties existing in Latin America, they could be catalogued as follows: the revolutionary and authoritarian left, the center-left, the center, the right, the center-right, and the only case of the extreme right - in Brazil.

It is also important to note that some of the new political leaders have shown a completely new model of taking part in politics during the election campaign. This refers especially to Nayib Bukele, the new and young president of El Salvador, who exclusively used social networks during the election campaign, showing the inability of traditional parties and state institutions to adapt to the changes and demands of society, and especially of the younger generations. According to Professor Malamud, this new practice indicates a great advantage and a lack of populism because it was transformed into digital populism, capable of establishing a direct relationship between the populist leader and the voter. Due to this possibility, the voter makes his decision independently of the traditional institutional channels (Malamud y Nuñez 2019, 1-10).

In addition, external variables will also influence the internal development of the region and its international position. It was mentioned earlier that apart from the US' strengthened influence, it is possible to detect a strategic presence of China and Russia, as well as the emergence of other economic and financial partners, such as the EU, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, India, South Africa, etc. The presence of other important world actors in Latin America could alleviate the US hegemony and prevent its military and unilateral interventions, as it has happened in the case of Venezuela.

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LATINSKA AMERIKA TOKOM PRVE DVE DEKADE 20. VEKA: SOCIOPOLITIČKE I EKONOMSKE PROMENE

Apstrakt: Autori se bave složenim društveno-političkim i ekonomskim promenama koje su se dogodile u Latinskoj Americi tokom prve dve deкаде XXI veka. Polazna je hipoteza autora da je u tom periodu u okvirima latinskoameričkog regionalizma došlo do značajnih unutrašnjih promena, kao i u odnosu regiona sa svetom. Sve ove promene odigrale su se u skladu sa teorijom složene međuzavisnosti i otvorenog regionalizma koji se oslanja na neoliberalne reforme. Nadalje, autori su identifikovali i spoljne varijable koje su direktno uticale na unutrašnji razvoj Latinske Amerike s obzirom na činjenicu da je došlo do duboke ideološke diferencijacije po pitanju ekonomskog, političkog i društvenog razvoja. Ideološko raslojavanje političkog konsenzusa koji je postojao u regionu tokom devedesetih godina prošlog veka doveo je i do pojave novih modela integracije, saradnje sa drugim blokovima u svetu ali i do pojave prve latinskoameričke sile u nastajanju (Brazil). Najznačajnije promene ipak su se dogodile u okvirima Južne Amerike gde su početkom XXI veka na vlast došli netradicionalni politički režimi, uključujući i Bolivarijanski revolucionarni u Venecueli. Svi ovi režimi bili su naglašeno protiv neoliberalizma kao političke i ekonomske doktrine pokušavajući da usvajanjem novih mera države pokrenu rešavanje duboke ekonomske krize koja je uzdrmala temelje latinskoameričke demokratije. U analizi ovih događaja autori su definisali dva perioda i na osnovu izbornih rezultata evaluirali ideološke promene i njihove posledice. Zaključak je da na početku treće decenije XXI veka i nakon okončanja izbornih ciklusa u 15 zemalja regiona dolazi do relativno uravnotežene podele vlasti između progresivnih levičarskih režima i desničarskih koji su bili u većini u drugoj deceniji XXI veka.

Ključne reči: Latinska Amerika, Južna Amerika, ekonomsko-politička tranzicija, socijalna kriza, ideološko raslojavanje, integracija, novi međunarodni položaj.

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