

## **IBEROAMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER**

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My contribution to the Adolfo Suarez seminar at the Estoril Forum will focus on how Iberoamerica has contributed to the world order and how its future is perceived at present, under the pandemic.

### The golden years of the Iberoamerican community

The Iberoamerican community of nations experienced a golden period from the 1990s until the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when it lived under the effects of the global financial crisis. This coincides with the period when the Iberoamerican summits begin in 1991, an annual summit that contributes in a very substantial way to the emergence of an Iberoamerican community that goes beyond mere celebration of cultural and historical ties and strengthen its cohesion by economic integration, political cooperation and the coordination of foreign policies.

All this took place against a background of economic growth and expanding democracy. The so-called Third wave of democracy that began in Portugal in 1974 was followed by the Spanish transition and very important democratic transitions in Latin America. It was so successful that there is a time when Cuba remained the only non-democratic country in Latin America, allowing definitely to dispel the myth that Iberoamerica was incapable of consolidating democracies.

A vision emerged then of Iberoamerica as a group of nations, based on two of the world's cultural communities, the Spanish speaking and the Portuguese speaking, reconciled by a common history rather than confronted by it, with solid democracies and increasingly prosperous countries. This became a solid bastion of the Atlantic and Western world in the post-cold war era liberal democracy was very much at the heart of this community.

### Its decline

Nevertheless, this vision collapses quite dramatically from the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the following reasons:

1. Global economic crisis, leading to great polarisation within the Iberoamerican community.
2. The Rise of Hugo Chavez and the spread of Chavism and the so-called socialism of the twenty century. This allowed the Cuban dictatorship that seemed condemned to ostracism to be revived, and the new Venezuelan-Cuban alliance was going to spread a new model that openly challenged liberal democracy.

For the supporters of Chavism and the Bolivarian revolution, liberal democracy is the same as the so-called bourgeois democracy was for communists in the twentieth century, a useful tool to reach power that should then be replaced.

Chavez and his post-modern model of communism provoked deep divisions within Latin America not only offering an alternative model of democracy but also of economic development, the so-called ALBA, Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America as an alternative to free trade area in the Americas mainly represented by MERCOSUR.

Chavism has been like a cancer for Latin America. It has ruined Venezuela, one of the wealthiest nations in America and led to a deep confrontation within Latin America and the whole Iberoamerican world.

### Democracy and stability in the Iberoamerican world

Despite the setbacks mentioned above, democracy in the Iberoamerican world on the whole is still quite resilient. The quality of democracy in Iberoamerica is relatively good if we situate it in global perspective where it has been in retreat for several years. Freedom House, the think tank specialised in evaluating democracy divides the world into free, semi-free and authoritarian. Most countries that are qualified as semi-free are electoral democracies but not liberal democracies.

Out of 22 members of the Iberoamerican community 12 are considered free, 7 semi-free. Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, República Dominicana y México are semi free, while 3 countries are not free: Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua

On the other hand solid democracies like Uruguay and Costa Rica, Chile and Argentina rank highly in Freedomhouse as well as Portugal and Spain.

### The worrying case of Spain

Spain was a model of transition to democracy. It has enjoyed some of the highest levels of democracy

Nevertheless, over the last years it is providing a classic case of decline of liberal democracy by the following trends:

1. Crisis of political institutions triggered by an economic crisis.
2. Collapse of the two-party system. Rise of an anti-system radical left, Podemos in close collaboration with Chavism and financed by Chaves and its network of allies.

This is an anti-system party, determined to implement a Spanish version of Chaves's socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and overthrow what they call "the 1978 regime," which is the present parliamentary monarchy.

Division of the centre-right spectrum, leading to a new centre party Ciudadanos, and then a new far-right party Vox.

Democratic Spain had taken pride on the fact that there was no extremism in Spanish politics and that there was no far right, but this finished over the last years.

3. Rise of secessionism. This is another manifestation of the decline of Spain's democratic consensus. The Catalan government used public funds to campaign for an illegal referendum internationally.

Spain has lived unprecedented instability over the last six years, in stark contrast with a remarkable stability which has been the norm since the 1980s

A royal abdication, an attempted coup, which is what the unilateral Catalan proclamation of independence was and four general elections, culminating with a parliament in which there are as many as 16 parties. At present the socialist-communist coalition government is also supported by several regional-nationalist parties and Catalan pro-independence parties.

Several of the Spanish government's initiatives have contributed to weaken the spirit of the 1978 Constitution.

1. Re-opening a public debate on the Spanish civil War, So-called Democratic Memory, replacing the Historic Memory Law, put an end to the amnesty law and had the undesirable effect of confronting Spaniards.
2. Monarchy. A campaign against the Monarchy led by Podemos, the extreme left and Catalan pro- independence parties.
3. Judiciary. A Proposal to change how members of the country's top judicial body, the General Council of the Judiciary so that it can be controlled by a parliamentary majority,

There is a plan to overthrow the so-called 1978 Regime, replace the Constitutional Monarchy by a Federal Republic. This plan is supported by a few members of the current coalition government and their allies in parliament. If this coalition government that has a very small majority at present were to get a larger majority in the next general election then this could become their main priority.

Spain has a very solid model of liberal democracy and is not threatened by authoritarianism, but there is a serious threat that Spain's liberal democracy will degenerate into an electoral democracy or into an ochlocracy, a mob rule.

## Conclusion

At present it is difficult to talk about an Iberoamerican community as it has become so polarised. Iberoamerica lacks a vision about the future world order and its role in it, because it is deeply divided and is severely affected by the spread of populism in the world.

A few of the members of the Iberoamerican community not only do not wish to be members of the liberal international order, they even refuse to consider themselves members of the Western world. At present in this unforgettable coronavirus year, authoritarianism is unfortunately becoming stronger. Venezuela is still standing against all odds, In the case of leading democracies like Spain populism is spreading. Let us hope that once we overcome the pandemic the Iberoamerican community will regain its sense of purpose.

Growing sense of historic community

Historical perspective Last four decades have been very successful. Third wave of democracy, beginning with Spain and Portugal. Chile to Colombia, Argentina to Peru

Case of Spain, among the top.

It is likely to maintain this position?

Very unlikely for the following reasons:

Over the last six years Spain has had a royal abdication, four national elections and an attempted coup in Catalonia. Remarkable change within

Rise of an extreme-left anti-system party: Podemos, challenging the constitution and one of its main pillars: the monarchy.

Dismemberment of the centre right. A new extremist party on the right Vox.

PSOE-Podemos coalition government led by Pedro Sanchez constitutes a threat to the 1978 constitution, not only Podemos is determined to put an end to it, but they have the support of pro-independent Catalan and Basque parties also eager to put an end to it.

1. Confrontation among Spaniards by opening the debate on the Spanish Civil War. The so-called Democracy Memory Law, by which losers of the civil war aim at taking revenge setting scores eighty years after its end.
2. Monarchy. Monarchy is under attack by the extreme left for the last eight years. Personal mistakes and scandals of King Juan Carlos have led a campaign against the monarchy. Two fronts: Podemos and the extreme left and the Catalan independent movement.

3. Judiciary. Last week's proposal to change the system by which members of the supreme court are elected by simple majority aims at controlling the judiciary.

Where does this lead? Open a new constituent process leading to a referendum, in which the government will advocate the Third Spanish republic.

What can save the system?

Civil society.

Monarchy. King Felipe VI as a figure that unites and represents the greatness of Spain, reminding about the importance of overcoming divisions

The EU. Warning from the EU Commission that the change of the judiciary altering the division of powers will not be tolerated.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the last six years the image of Spain has changed from that of a model democracy to that of a failing democracy. One of the two parties in government aims at putting an end to the Monarchy and the 1978 Constitution.

It can be saved by solid civil society, opposition, media both traditional and social media, economic crisis leading to unpopularity of the government and above all the EU.