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Mapping the
Global Age (Part II)

Lessons from Mount Lu: China and cross-cultural understanding

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Mount Lu is a famous mountain in Jiangxi Province in southeast China, famous not just for its natural beauty, but also for its rich historical associations. Throughout the centuries, many poets and writers have immortalized the mountain in numerous poems and literary prose, of which a short quatrain, “Written on the Wall of the Temple of West Woods,” by one of China’s greatest poets, Su Shi (1037-1101) in the eleventh century, is perhaps the most memorable. The poem describes Mount Lu in four lines:

Viewed horizontally a range; a cliff from the side;
It differs as we move high or low, or far or nearby.
We do not know the true face of Mount Lu,
Because we are all ourselves inside.

The particular appeal of this poem lies in its philosophical insight into the interaction between recognition and

perspective, the changing views of an object as the hermeneutic horizon moves and changes, and the difficulty of knowing anything in its entirety and from within. “We do not know the true face of Mound Lu,” says the poet, “Because we are all ourselves inside.” The last two lines are so well-known that they become part of the common parlance with the implication that the very interiority of the location makes it impossible for the knowing subject to have true knowledge, that the insider may have blind spots and epistemic limitations, while presumably the outsider may command a better view and have better knowledge at a critical or reflective distance. That has indeed been many readers’ understanding of that famous poem.

430 If we take Mount Lu as a synecdoche for China as a whole, then, such a reading of the poem could be taken to imply an endorsement of Sinology or China studies that looks at China not from within, but from the outside. The Sinologist as an outsider could then be seen as the one who understands China better than a native Chinese does, given the latter’s necessary limitations and blind spots. Many Sinologists, particularly those trained in social sciences in the West, do think of China as an object of study, as something to be analyzed by employing Western social scientific theories and methodologies. In some cases, there is what I would call a “social science arrogance,” which also smacks of an Orientalist bias, in the sense that a Western scholar would think of China and the Chinese only in terms of providing materials for a critical analysis made possible only in the West by using Western theories with precision and

sophistication. China and Chinese language materials become serviceable only as so much grist to the Sinological mill, but cannot speak in their own voice, nor can they have their own stance or present their own insights. Sinology or Western China studies lay claim to better understanding of China precisely because they are not native Chinese scholarship, and that they observe Mount Lu, so to speak, from the outside.

In American China studies, however, that attitude has gone under challenge and severe criticism. According to Paul Cohen, to look at China from a Western perspective is precisely the problem with Western Sinology in general, and American Sinology in particular. He identifies three different American models in China studies. The first one, the “Western impact and Chinese response” approach, understands Chinese history from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth, i.e., from the Opium Wars in the 1840s to the 1911 Revolution and the establishment of the Republic of China, as a history determined by the impact from the West on China as a stagnant, weak, and dying empire. The second is the “modernization” approach that interprets modern Chinese history as a continuous but ineffective effort at modernization, which is understood as Westernization. Finally, there emerged in the 1960s the framework of “imperialism,” namely, a framework in which progressive China scholars discussed how Western imperialism had influenced and impeded the unfolding of modern Chinese history. All three of these approaches look at China from an outsider’s perspective, in which whatever is considered im-

portant in the study of Chinese history is judged by a Western measurement at the cost of native experience and the internal route of development in modern Chinese history. Therefore, Cohen argues, “all three, in one way or another, introduce Western-centric distortions into our understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century China.”¹ Against such Western-centric distortions of Chinese history, Cohen advocates a “China-centered” approach that puts emphasis on Chinese language materials and Chinese perspectives, and tries to adopt a native’s point of view empathetically. The new approach “begins with Chinese problems set in a Chinese context,” says Cohen. No matter whether or how these problems may be related to the West, they are, says **432** Cohen, “*Chinese* problems, in the double sense that they are experienced in China by Chinese and that the measure of their historical importance is a Chinese, rather than a Western, measure.”² As an American scholar himself, Cohen was courageous to present his critique of Western-centrism in American Sinology in the early 1980s; his book marks an important point of paradigmatic change in China studies, but it has also remained somewhat controversial.

The difficulty with Cohen’s “China-centered” approach lies not just in the still strong sense of the theoretical superiority of Western social science models, which most Western scholars necessarily embrace, that is, a sense of supe-

1 Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering history in China: American historical writing on the recent Chinese past*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 5.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

riority that may account for the resistance to, if not downright rejection of, Cohen's proposal by many Sinologists. The difficulty lies rather in the theoretical dilemma of the "China-centered" approach itself. First of all, it is impossible for Western China scholars to become native Chinese and adopt a native point of view, even if they are willing to do so, and, second, the native point of view does not guarantee better understanding of historical events or the reality of any given period of history. Of course, Cohen realizes this, and what he asks Western China scholars to do is not "eliminating all ethnocentric distortion," but "reducing such distortion to the minimum."³ That is certainly reasonable, but the sheer enormity and complexity of China and its history make it very difficult to reach a level of understanding that can claim to have the true view of the matter or the "true face of Mount Lu." Even if one can imitate or emulate a native participant's experience and point of view, it is just a particular individual's experience and point of view, which may be very different from the totality of historical experience we call China or Chinese history as a whole. In the nineteenth century, developing an insight expressed first in Giambattista Vico's *New science*, Wilhelm Dilthey once claimed that "the first condition of possibility of a science of history is that I myself am a historical being, that the person studying history is the person making history."⁴ Vico and Dilthey, however, have not solved the

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3 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

4 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, p. 278, quoted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, 2nd revised ed., trans. revised by Joel

problem of how finite individual historical experience can become knowledge of a given period of history as a whole.

H. G. Gadamer argues that

positing homogeneity as its condition conceals the real epistemological problem of history. The question is how the individual's experience and the knowledge of it come to be historical experience. (...) the important question remains how such infinite understanding is possible for finite human nature.⁵

Whatever you see as Mount Lu is just a particular sight or part of it, and how that particular view can claim to be the true face of Mount Lu is the difficult epistemic question for all historical understanding. Su Shi seems to suggest that a "China-centered" view is unable to reach a complete view or comprehensive historical understanding, because the insider's finite experience and knowledge are hardly transferable to a true understanding of Mount Lu as a whole.

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The way Cohen solves that problem is by dividing China into small pieces of more or less manageable sizes, "horizontally" into regions, provinces, prefectures, counties, and cities, and "vertically" into various levels and social strata, and by so doing he makes the study of China more concretely as the study of regional and local histories on the one hand, and popular and non-popular lower-level histories on the other. Once China studies is localized and cut up into small-size studies, however, as Cohen himself admits, the approach "is not *China*-centered at all, but re-

Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York, Crossroad, 1975, p. 222.

5 Gadamer, *ibid.*, p. 222, 232.

gion-centered, or province-centered or locality-centered.”⁶ Not only that, but the theories and methodologies of Cohen’s China-centered paradigm are not Chinese, either, as he “welcomes with enthusiasm the theories, methodologies, and techniques developed in disciplines other than history (mostly, but not exclusively, the social sciences) and strives to integrate these into historical analysis.”⁷ As all these social science theories and methodologies are developed in Western scholarship, the use of these would seriously undermine the “China-centered” approach that puts so much emphasis on native Chinese experience and native Chinese criteria in value-judgment. This constitutes a real challenge to any claim to native perspective *vis-à-vis* a “Western” perspective, or an insider’s view *vis-à-vis* an outsider’s view. The insider, again as the poet Su Shi tells us, does not know “the true face of Mount Lu” simply because he is trapped in his own limited horizon or perspective.

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Indeed, Cohen’s “China-centered” paradigm has its problems, but its critique of Western-centrism is certainly valid and important, for the outsider may be equally limited in his external perspective that often lacks inside experience. Sinology or China studies in the West are by definition Western, and a Sinologist cannot but look at China from the outside. That is not a problem, but a problem arises when a Sinologist insists that only an outsider can have

6 Cohen, *Discovering history in China*, p. 162.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 186-7.

a better view of Mount Lu, or that the inside and the outside are mutually exclusive and incommensurate. The former, i.e., the conviction of the superiority of the outsider's view, is an assumption sometimes consciously, but often unconsciously, held by many Western scholars, while the latter, i.e., the concept of the East-West dichotomy, is often explicitly expressed in Western discourses on China. Influential thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, for example, even though they have no interest in Sinology or China studies as such, nevertheless use China as a symbol of a cultural "Other" fundamentally different from the European self. Foucault's most strange and unconceivable "heterotopia," manifested in a bizarre classification system of animals, an "exotic charm of another system of thought" allegedly found in a "Chinese encyclopaedia," offers a curious example.⁸ Derrida's claim that the largely non-phonetic Chinese scripts embody the perfect "*différance*" and bear "the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" offers another.⁹ Such claims and assertions about China as the opposite of the West are telling signs of the intellectual climate of our times, and it is therefore not surprising to find some China scholars working to further these claims.

The French scholar François Jullien is probably the most vocal in asserting the fundamental differences between

8 Michel Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, New York, Vintage, 1973, p. xv.

9 Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 90.

Chinese and Greek perspectives and values, and he understands Sinology as ultimately an effort to return to the European self through the experience of China as pure difference, for he maintains that “China presents a case study through which to contemplate Western thought from the outside.”¹⁰ For Jullien, China represents an alternative to Europe, and he claims that “strictly speaking, *non-Europe* is China, and it cannot be anything else.”¹¹ In his numerous publications, Jullien often sets up two columns of concepts or categories, one Greek and the other Chinese, perfectly opposite and contrastive to one another. Those contrastive columns, however, have more to do with Jullien’s predilection for contraries than with Greek or Chinese thought and culture as such, for it is his contrastive argument that turns his image of China into the reverse of Greece. His systematically contrastive method makes it predictable that whatever he finds in China is the opposite of Greece, thus always a confirmation of fundamental cultural differences.

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In setting up a dichotomy between China and Europe, particularly ancient China and ancient Greece, Jullien follows a French intellectual genealogy, in which differences between the East and the West, particularly China and Greece, are often brought to a philosophical level of language and thinking. For example, under the influence of

10 François Jullien, *Detour and access: strategies of meaning in China and Greece*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York, Zone Books, 2000, p. 9.

11 François Jullien with Thierry Marchaisse, *Penser d’un dehors (la Chine): entretiens d’Extrême-Occident*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000, p. 39.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's concept of the collective and distinct *mentalité*, Marcel Granet proposed the idea of a distinct Chinese *mentalité* or *la pensée chinoise*, which differs profoundly from that of the West.¹² Likewise, in examining the failure of Christian mission in China, Jacques Gernet attributed that failure to fundamental differences between China and the West, "not only of different intellectual traditions but also of different mental categories and modes of thought."¹³ These arguments obviously anticipate Jullien's Chinese-Greek opposition. As Jonathan Spence remarks, to set up "mutually reinforcing images and perceptions" of an exotic China "seems to have been a particularly French genius."¹⁴ That is not quite true, however, because it is not just French scholars who put excessive emphasis on cultural differences between the East and the West. The American scholar Richard Nisbett, for example, puts incredibly large numbers of people together as mutually incommensurate groups and argue that "members of different cultures differ in their 'metaphysics,' or fundamental beliefs about the nature of the world," and that "the characteristic thought processes of different groups differ greatly."¹⁵ What he is

12 See Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise*, Paris, Editions Albin Michel, 1968.

13 Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian impact: a conflict of cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 3.

14 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's great continent: China in Western minds*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 145.

15 Richard Nisbett, *The geography of thought: how Asians and Westerners think differently... and Why*, New York, The Free Press, 2003, p. xvi-xvii.

talking about here are two huge groups, one “Asians” and the other “Westerners,” who, according to Nisbett, differ fundamentally in thinking and in behavior. So in Western scholarship on China or the East, we may often find such an either/or opposition or East/West divide, which sets up a Western self against which the various aspects of China or Chinese culture are brought up as contrast or as a reverse mirror image. These are self-consciously outsiders’ points of view, and in their discussions of Chinese language, literature, thought, and culture, these scholars almost totally ignore the insiders, that is, Chinese scholars and their works written in Chinese. This certainly runs counter to the spirit of the “China-centered” paradigm, which, as Cohen puts it, tries “to get inside China, to reconstruct Chinese history as far as possible as the Chinese themselves experienced it.”¹⁶ The problem with such dichotomous claims is the “social science arrogance” I mentioned earlier, i.e., Western claims and assertions that are put forward as though they are universal truths applicable to China or things Chinese. Instead of a humble acknowledgement that we “do not know the true face of Mount Lu,” either from the inside or from the outside, such claims are often presented as scientific representations of the “true face of Mount Lu.”

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Given the predominant influence of the West in economic, political, and many other aspects of social life in our time, it is particularly important to be alert to the lim-

16 Paul A. Cohen, *China unbound: evolving perspectives on the Chinese past*, London, Routledge-Curzon, 2003, p. 1.

itations of universal claims to truth based on European or Western experience and history. A case in point is the debate of the very concept of “China” as a nation-state. In Western scholarship, the nation-state is understood as a modern concept, a political entity formulated during the Renaissance or early modernity. “The modern state is a sovereign state. Sovereignty is a concept that was invented in the modern world-system,” says Immanuel Wallerstein.¹⁷ Obviously the concept of a sovereign state is formulated on the basis of European history, with no consideration of the other parts of the world, but because of the influence of the theory of world-system and the concept of nation-state, some have come to question whether China before the seventeenth century could have been a nation state, or just an “imagined community.”

This has become an important issue in China, and a leading Chinese scholar, Ge Zhaoguang of Fudan University, has made a powerful argument against the anachronistic imposition of a modern European concept on ancient China and its very different history. “Different from Europe, China’s political territory and cultural space spread out from the center towards the peripheries,” says Ge.

Even without mentioning the pre-Qin antiquity, at least from the time of the Qin and the Han dynasties, by “unifying the width of vehicle tracks, unifying the written scripts, and unifying moral codes,” language and writing, moral principles and customs, and the political system began to gradually stabilize the nation within this space, and this is quite different from the European understanding of the nation as

17 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems analysis: an introduction*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 42.

a new phenomenon in late human history. Therefore, the theory that separates traditional empires and modern states into two different eras does not fit in well with Chinese history, nor does it fit the Chinese consciousness of a nation or the history of the emergence of a nation.¹⁸

Ge puts his question straight for wardly:

We may ask in return: does a historian need to consider the particularities of Chinese history that differs from European history? The general homogeneity of Chinese civilization, particularly of the Han nationality, the coincidence between the living space of the Han people and the space of the various dynasties, the continuity of the Han tradition and the allegiance to the Han political authorities—are all these simply “accidental” and “controversial”? Is China a nation-state set up gradually only in modern times (understood as Western modernity)?¹⁹

With ample historical evidences and solid textual analysis, Ge Zhaoguang proposes to understand China not just internally, but in relation to the larger context of East Asian history. At the same time, he has a strong sense of the specific stance a historian will necessarily take in a particular historical and cultural tradition, from which a Chinese historian may challenge the validity of mechanically applying Western concepts to non-Western histories and realities. After all, an outsider’s view may also be limited with its own blind spots.

When we read the Su Shi poem on “Mount Lu” again, we may realize that the poem is perhaps a victim of the success of its own last two lines; so much so that people tend to read it as an endorsement of the outsider’s point of view.

18 Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhaizi Zhongguo: chongjian youguan ‘Zhongguo’ de lishi lunshu* [*Here in China I Dwell: reconstructing the historical narratives of ‘China’*], Beijing, Zhonghua, 2011, p. 28.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

It is true that the poet says: “We do not know the true face of Mount Lu,/Because we are all ourselves inside”; but it is important to note that the poet does *not* say that we would know “the true face of Mount Lu” if we get outside. If we pay attention to the equally important two opening lines, then we may realize that the meaning of this poem is quite different from the conventional reading. In the very first line, Su Shi presents two very different views of Mount Lu as “a range” and “a cliff,” which are equally valid as representations of Mount Lu, though viewed from different angles, “horizontally” or “from the side.” The poet continues to say that Mount Lu “differs as we move high or low, or far or nearby,” thus completely invalidates any particular view or particular representation as the only true one. Su Shi is far too subtle and perceptive a poet to endorse the simplistic claim to truth either by the insider or the outsider, and to read this poem as privileging the outsider’s view is only to misread it. What the poet endorses is the plurality of views or the multi-dimensionality of Mount Lu as a compelling and complex presence that can be viewed from diverse perspectives. To put it differently, neither insiders nor outsiders have a privileged point of view, and, by extending this insight to our discussion of China studies, we may realize that no particular point of view has privileged access to knowledge in the understanding of China, its history, society, culture, and tradition. At best, insiders and outsiders are all limited in their respective horizons and finite determinacy, and at worst, the insider’s blind spots are matched only by the outsider’s ignorance and lack of sensitivity.

In an insightful 1972 essay, the famous sociologist Robert Merton had already exposed the limitations of both insiders and outsiders who claim to have a *monopolistic* or *privileged* access to certain kinds of knowledge. “In structural terms,” says Merton, “we are all, of course, both Insiders and Outsiders, members of some groups and, sometimes derivatively, not of others; occupants of certain statuses which thereby exclude us from occupying other cognate statuses.” This is obviously true with any individual or social group, but more importantly, we should realize “the crucial fact of social structure that individuals have not a single status but a status set: a complement of variously interrelated statuses which interact to affect both their behavior and perspectives.”²⁰ More recently, Amartya Sen also puts emphasis on the same crucial fact that it is the illusion of singular and exclusive identities that breeds conflict and war in our world. “Violence is fomented,” he says, “by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror.”²¹ In making sense of identities, we must realize that we always have plural affiliations and multiple identities: “We are all individually involved in identities of various kinds in disparate contexts, in our own respective lives, arising from our background, or associations, or social activities.”²² The

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20 Robert K. Merton, “The perspectives of insiders and outsiders,” in *The sociology of science: theoretical and empirical investigations*, ed. Norman W. Storer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 113.

21 Amartya Sen, *Identity and violence: the illusion of destiny*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2006, p. 2.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

lessons from Mount Lu do not come to form a simple endorsement of any particular point of view, either the insider's or the outsider's. With such an insight into our plural and interrelated "statuses" or multiple "identities," we may now realize that it is untenable to hold that only Chinese can understand China or, equally absurdly, that only a Western scholar can provide an outsider's "objective" view and thus provide us with true knowledge about China. The point is that no particular horizon or perspective can guarantee better knowledge, but that knowledge or scholarship as such should be assessed with a set of intellectual criteria that transcend the simple opposition between native scholarship and Sinological lore, or an insider's historical experience and an outsider's critical reflection. Understanding China and Chinese history requires integration of different views from different perspectives, but such integration is not a simple juxtaposition of insiders' and outsiders' views; it is more of an act of interaction and mutual illumination than simply adding up native Chinese scholarship and Western Sinology. "We no longer ask whether it is the Insider or the Outsider who has monopolistic or privileged access to social knowledge," to quote Merton's words again, "instead, we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of seeking truth."²³ In the pursuit of knowledge, being an insider or an outsider is often functionally irrelevant, and we must negotiate among our plural affiliations and multiple identities as well as those of others in order to reach a better understanding.

23 Merton, *The sociology of science*, p. 129.

In the postmodern questioning of fundamental truths, however, there is a tendency to emphasize the constructiveness of all categories and to negate the very presence of anything as entities objectively or really there. History is thus thought of as a textual construction, not as something as solid as a mountain. And yet, the mountain metaphor for understanding history is quite appropriate, for as E. H. Carr argues, though we should discard the positivistic notion of “objectivity,” the finite determinacy of our own horizon cannot erase the existence of “the things themselves.” Carr remarks, as though in conversation with Su Shi:

It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes. It does not follow that, because interpretation plays a necessary part in establishing the facts of history, and because no existing interpretation is wholly objective, one interpretation is as good as another, and the facts of history are in principle not amenable to objective interpretation.²⁴

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The mountain metaphor works to the extent that historical events always happen at particular locations and geographical territories, in concrete circumstances and with materiality of their own. Nation, sovereignty, people and their cultures all have spatial connotations. History as such, however, means more than just the concrete, material, and territorial, and therefore its richness and complexity cannot be captured entirely by the mountain metaphor. Historiography not only as record but also as interpretation involves more than what the concrete mountain met-

24 E. H. Carr, *What is history?*, Harmondsworth, Eng., Penguin Books, 1964, p. 26-7.

aphor may suggest, as it must have the historian's engagement and participation, thus the limitations of horizons and perspectives. In that sense, Su Shi's poem on Mount Lu is more instructive than a simple description of a mountain, for it speaks more of the difficulty of understanding than the presence of "things themselves," though the existence of the mountain is tacitly acknowledged. This difficulty, the limitation of our horizons and our finite determinacy, the difficulty of knowing something far away or up close, constitutes the challenge of China studies as it does all other humanistic disciplines. But it also encourages us to open up to different perspectives and other views, to look from various angles, to judge all with a set of intellectual criteria that transcends group allegiances and local identities, and to reach what might be a closer approximation of Mount Lu, or whatever it is that we set out to study.

“Small” countries and “large” countries: the case of Uruguay in Mercosur and Unasur

Gerardo Caetano

What does being a “small country” mean in the world today? In recent times, in which such dizzying changes have occurred, how has the traditional subject of the relationship between “small” and “gigantic” been redefined? Uruguay’s self-image has historically been that of “a small country between two giants”; what can this country contribute—in its capacity as a “watchtower”¹—to this ana-

1 Uruguayan essayist Alberto Methol Ferré, an active promoter of an integrationist vision for Latin American countries, used to note in his work that despite its inveterate insular and pro-European mind-set, Uruguay constituted a suitable watchtower from which to interpret the region and the world. In the original version of this paper, in Spanish, the term *atalaya* is used, which is defined in the latest edition of the Royal Spanish Academy dictionary as: “**atalaya**. (Del ár. hisp. *attaláya*, y este del ár. clás. *talā'i*). 1. f. Torre hecha comúnmente en lugar alto, para registrar

lytical perspective? How has the geopolitical balance shifted in the Río de la Plata basin? How has this view been reshaped in a country that for over 21 years has been using as the cornerstone of its strategy for international inclusion that of being a State Party in a regional bloc such as Mercosur (the Southern Common Market), born and still visualized today as an exceptionally asymmetrical integration pact between “two large countries and two small ones”? What does Uruguay’s status, as the southern neighbour of today’s emerging Brazil and being a part of the South American integration process in Unasur (Union of South American Nations), add in this regard? This paper contains some reflections as input for a broader and more current

448 debate on the more general subject of changing standards in the relationship between “small” and “large” in the contemporary world.

1. A reformulation of the subject of “scale” among countries

Over one hundred years ago, a Salesian priest born in France, who had arrived in Uruguay in 1897 and whose name was Gilbert Perret, but who signed his work under the pseudonym H.D. (*Hermano Damasceno*—Brother Dama-

desde ella el campo o el mar y dar aviso de lo que se descubre. **2.** f. Eminencia o altura desde donde se descubre mucho espacio de tierra o mar. **3.** f. Estado o posición desde la que se aprecia bien una verdad.” (1. A tower usually built in a high place, in order to watch over land or sea and report on what is discovered there. 2. A promontory or high place from which a great deal of land or sea can be seen. 3. A state or position from which a truth can be better appreciated.)

sceno), maintained insistently in the most successful of his school books (*Ensayo de historia patria*—An essay on national history) that Uruguayans should rid themselves of the notion that theirs was a “small country.” To this end, he found no better argument than to display the contour of Uruguay enclosing various European countries, as shown in the maps below.

Notwithstanding this unusual approach, H.D.’s suggestion introduced a significant concept: a definition of scale should be based on comparisons and these should be grounded on the widest and most comprehensive perspective. The author also pointed out in his history book (which was written for school children):

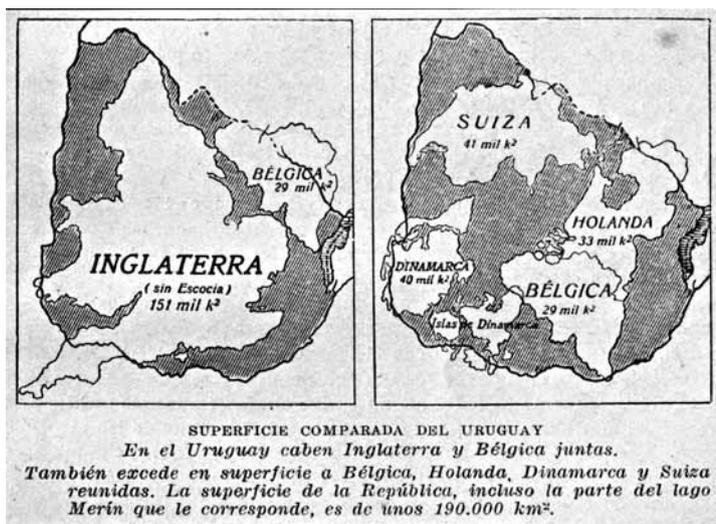
This [Uruguay] is not a small homeland, even in geographical terms: our country covers two hundred thousand square kilometres. This area is two thirds the territory of England and of Italy, almost half of France, of Germany and of Spain; it is six times larger than Belgium, five times larger than Switzerland, three times larger than Greece—this territory is equal to Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark and Greece put together. This is quite large enough.²

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The comparisons chosen by the Salesian priest revealed the pro-European disposition of the Uruguayan viewpoint. He was well aware that for his Uruguayan readers, even though they were children, any international comparison would only be convincing if European countries were used as a reference. The “American Switzerland,” a term which people within and without the country prided themselves on insistently repeating, saw the world through the prism

2 H. D., *Ensayo de historia patria* [An essay on national history], volume 2, Montevideo, Barreiro y Ramos, 1941, pages 951 and 952.

Map of Uruguay in comparative terms



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Map on left: ENGLAND (without Scotland), 151,000 km² BELGIUM, 29,000 km².

Map on right (clockwise from top): SWITZERLAND 41,000 km²; HOLLAND, 33,000 km²; BELGIUM, 29,000 km²; Danish Islands / DENMARK, 40,000 km².

Comparative size of Uruguay

England and Belgium together fit within the territory of Uruguay.

In addition, Uruguay is larger than Belgium, Holland and Denmark and Switzerland together. The area of the Republic, including the section of Lake Merín which is part of its territory covers some 190,000 km².

Source: H.D., *Ensayo de historia patria* [An essay on national history], Montevideo, Barreiro y Ramos, 1941 (7th edition).

of its “transatlantic borders,” focusing on Europe in the first place and on the United States in the second. All the rest, even the close neighbours on which the country mainly depended, were viewed as “complementary,” or on the margins of this dominant cultural world vision.³

3 As from the 1900s, a vision of itself as a “European island” separate from its Latin American neighbours predominated in the self-perception of Uruguayan society. The most successful syntagma devised in this

For his part, in 1953, Eduardo J. Couture, a noted Uruguayan intellectual, published an emblematic book. Its title, *La comarca y el mundo* [The region and the world], was already outlining a broad interpretative horizon with strong links to some of the reflections contained in this paper.⁴ After describing several of the features which in his view characterized the Uruguayas of his period (among which he highlighted their "confrontational temperament" and, at the same time, their basic agreement regarding "democracy as a superior form of human coexistence"), Couture asked himself how he could discover whether his interpretation was "correct or mistaken." He himself proposed a way to answer this question:

(...) the best way to understand one's own country is by comparison. Uruguayans still use comparison very sparingly. Furthermore, when they do compare, they do so by contrasting reality with ideals. (...) In order to cure oneself of exaggeration it is advisable to take one's distance from time to time. Any distance in time and space is beneficial in order to learn about one's own country (...): the region seen from afar and the world seen in relation to the region.

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Later, Couture recreated a "journey" of reflections based on a number of notes and comments on different places in America and Europe that he had visited. At the conclusion of a lengthy itinerary, the celebrated Uruguayan jurist returned to the beginning of his book, "*recalling*," as he him-

regard was that of the *American Switzerland*, but there were others: the *South American France*, the *Athens of the River Plate*, the *Río de la Plata Antwerp*, etc.

4 Eduardo J. Couture, *La comarca y el mundo* [The region and the world], Montevideo, 1953.

self noted, “the geography of the region.” “Finally,” concluded Couture,

our life is based on a square metre of land. (...) We should form an awareness of the world and work towards it; but we shall never work harder for the world than when we strive to ensure the authenticity of our own small region. (...) the more a man belongs to his own country and time, the more shall he belong to all countries and eras. In the beginning was the region. The world was bestowed in addition.

This was 1953. Although several “cracks in the wall” (as Carlos Real de Azúa put it) were already apparent in their early welfare state, Uruguayans still had reason to dream of the “eternity” of their “American Switzerland” and their “hyperintegrated society.” The stubbornly present “transatlantic borders” continued to cloud the vision of what Luis Alberto de Herrera so rightly called an “international Uruguay.” A growing provincialism was beginning to be felt, with all of its dangers. The world was experiencing profound changes and Uruguayans—with some exceptions—seemed to be unaware of them. In any case, there were still enough inherited features and energy to postpone—if only for a short time—the tragedy which finally overwhelmed the country in the sixties and seventies.

Nearly sixty years later and in view of everything we have experienced since that time, there is no doubt that provincialism is a failing that nobody can afford, either in the region or in the world. And yet this increasingly dangerous trait continues to haunt us, particularly in matters involving foreign affairs and strategies for international inclusion or its political and cultural foundations. How can we fight this provincialism, which is always harmful, but particu-

larly so in this time of renewed and overpowering globalization? There are, in fact, no fixed formulas with which to do so. However, in any case, it appears to be advisable to accumulate comparative knowledge, solidly focused on an effectively global "world," without "short-sightedness" of any kind, with the specific objective of providing greater connectivity for problems and approaches. In this respect, the suggestions of H.D. and Couture may be useful, although it is imperative to endow them with new meaning in order to make them genuinely contemporary. In order to reflect on scale, within and without one's own country, it is still necessary to compare. However, the world has changed, or perhaps the West should make visible some of the "regressions" that its ethnocentric vision has obscured. **453** At the same time, an "awareness of the world" is indispensable in order to situate one's "region" without provincialism and constitutes a starting point which is as essential as the need for "new spectacles."

As a point of departure from which to begin delving into the "Uruguayan case" with regard to the link between "large" and "small" in the world today, the following brief series of demographic, geographic and economic data is provided as a comprehensive update of some of the comparisons suggested one hundred years ago by H.D., in order to acquire a better understanding of Uruguay. Chart 1 shows territorial and population data for the Mercosur countries, as well as for Belgium, Holland and France, to use some of the examples handled by the author of the old school book. Charts 2, 3 and 4 show comparative econom-

ic data (exports, imports and GDP at present rates of exchange) for the same countries.

An overview of these charts calls for some brief remarks:

- i. the geographic and demographic scale of the countries under review displays very considerable asymmetries and contrasts;
- ii. these asymmetries do not relate to their economic performance, particularly with regard to their flow of trade as well as, to a lesser extent, the evolution of their GDP.

The following inferences arise from the data presented above and exemplify these two points: with barely one sixth of the territory of Uruguay (the smallest of the Mercosur countries), in 2000, Belgian exports more than doubled the exports of the entire Mercosur, and with the addition of Holland (the surface area of both these countries together is two and a half times less than Uruguay's), this proportion was approximately 4.5 to 1. Ten years later and after the flow of trade increased very significantly in Mercosur, particularly during 2005-2010, Belgian exports are almost the same as the annual exports of the entire Mercosur, whereas if we include Holland, the ratio also decreases, but is still markedly superior, at 2.5 to 1. With regard to the evolution of GDP, despite its variations over the ten-year period under consideration, the relation has remained more or less stable at 2.5 to 1 in favour of Mercosur as a whole. Comparisons could continue to be made, but they would certainly all lead to the need for increased problem-posing efforts in considering the scale of countries and how

Chart 1

Comparative population and territorial data

Territory and population per country/region

| Country/Region | Territory (km ²) | Population (*) (millions of inhab.) |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Belgium | 30 528 | 10 827 |
| Holland | 41 526 | 16 785 |
| France | 674 843 | 65 821 |
| MERCOSUR | | |
| Argentina | 2 766 890 | 40 091 |
| Brazil | 8 514 877 | 190 732 |
| Paraguay | 406 752 | 6 349 |
| Uruguay | 176 215 | 3 494 |

Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/>.

(*) This figure is estimated for 2011 in the case of Belgium and corresponds to 2011 for France. Figures for Holland are estimated for 2008. Figures for Argentina and Brazil are for 2010 and figures for Paraguay and Uruguay are estimated for 2009.

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Chart 2

Comparative economic data (2000)

Exports, imports and GDP per country/region 2000 (billion US dollars)

| Country/Region | Exports | Imports | GDP (current rate of exchange) |
|-----------------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Belgium | 181.4 | 166 | 259.2 |
| Holland | 210.3 | 201.2 | 388.4 |
| France | 325 | 320 | 1448 |
| MERCOSUR | | | |
| Argentina | 26.5 | 25.2 | 476 |
| Brazil | 55.1 | 55.8 | 1.130 |
| Paraguay | 3.5 | 3.3 | 26.2 |
| Uruguay | 2.6 | 3.4 | 31 |

Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/>.

Chart 3

Comparative economic data (2005)

Exports, imports and GDP per country/region 2005 (billion US dollars)

| Country/Region | Exports | Imports | GDP (current rate of exchange) |
|------------------|---------|---------|--------------------------------------|
| Belgium | 255.7 | 235 | 322.3 |
| Holland | 293.1 | 252.7 | 497.9 |
| France | 419 | 419.7 | 1794 |
| MERCOSUR | | | |
| Argentina | 33.78 | 22.06 | 543.4 |
| Brazil | 95 | 61 | 1.536 |
| Paraguay | 2.94 | 3.33 | 29.11 |
| Uruguay | 2.2 | 2.07 | 33.98 |

Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/>.

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Chart 4

Comparative economic data (2010)

Exports, imports and GDP per country/region 2010 (billion US dollars)

| Country/Region | Exports | Imports | GDP (current rate of exchange) |
|------------------|---------|---------|--------------------------------------|
| Belgium | 279.2 | 281.7 | 394.3 |
| Holland | 451.3 | 408.4 | 676.9 |
| France | 508.7 | 577.7 | 2145 |
| MERCOSUR | | | |
| Argentina | 68.5 | 56.44 | 596 |
| Brazil | 199.7 | 187.7 | 2.172 |
| Paraguay | 7.97 | 9.57 | 33.31 |
| Uruguay | 6.7 | 8.3 | 47.99 |

Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/>.

it reflects on the field of economics and development. In the end, and notwithstanding his simplifications, perhaps H.D. was not so far off track in the "calls" to reflection he made a century ago.

2. Patterns in the relationship between "small" Uruguay and its "giant" neighbours: change and permanence in the neighbourhood

In recent decades, the relationship between Argentina and Brazil has changed radically in terms of historical perspective, which has led to the logical consequence of significantly tipping the regional balance in the American Southern Cone. Argentina and Brazil have not yet fully grasped the various implications of their new associational relationship; neither have the remaining "border States" of the region been able to decode these repercussions from their respective viewpoints. Whereas Brazil is becoming an increasingly "global" actor, a trend which at least reshapes the level of its commitments and interests in the region, Argentina does not appear to be able to make the right moves with regard to establishing new levels of contributions and demands in this new bilateral relationship with its former rival. Although a number of different generalizations continue to be made with regard to this point, Mercosur as a whole has also failed to pinpoint accurately the impact of this new "privileged bilateralism" on its regional project. To this we should add that it is not easy to imagine in practice how this preferential Argentine-Brazilian relationship could be specifically deployed without giving rise to exclusions. In any

case, the old equation between two competing “hegemonic States” and three “border States” which are very different, but with fairly similar stop-and-go rationales, is no longer current in the Río de la Plata basin, but it does not appear to have been replaced by any effective alternative new balance.

In the following pages, we shall attempt to contribute some historical input regarding this problematical matter. We shall adopt two perspectives:

- i. in the first we shall provide some more remote background to Mercosur, related to tensions arising from the stimuli of conflict, cooperation and integration in the region;
- 458 ii. in the second, and from a Uruguayan viewpoint, we describe some guidelines for analysis in order to bring into question the currency of the more “enduring” challenges with regard to an “international Uruguay” and its forms of inclusion into the region and the world.

*“Hegemonic States” and “border States”
in the Río de la Plata Basin*

Both in geographic and historical terms, the territory of the Río de la Plata basin presents a bipolar outline with two hegemonic poles—the large states of Argentina and Brazil—and a border area composed of the three “small” remaining countries (Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay). The long-standing competition for regional leadership between Argentina and Brazil was undoubtedly the foremost source

of the conflict-based paradigm that prevailed in the region until at least the eighties in the 20th century. For their part, the remaining “border” countries basically oscillated—although in different ways, as we shall see—between the two giants. The isolationist alternative was closed to them definitively after the ominous destruction of “early” Paraguay in the War of the Triple Alliance.

Landlocked since the also reprehensible War of the Pacific, Bolivia as well as Paraguay became, in a way, geopolitical prisoners, with the resulting severe limitations arising from such a situation. Uruguay, on the other hand, given its privileged location at the mouth of the Río de la Plata estuary, was able to enjoy other opportunities for connection beyond the region, and yet its history, as we shall see, cannot be understood other than in close relation to the vicissitudes befalling the region—although with a greater degree of flexibility. Each in its different way, even including belligerent confrontations (Bolivia and Paraguay engaged in the fratricidal Chaco War between 1932 and 1935), the three smaller countries of the basin constituted a border area whose support the two “giants” of the region keenly disputed in their attempt to strengthen their respective projects and aspirations regarding leadership.

In this regard, Paulo R. Schilling has rightly pointed out in one of his works:

The region exhibits the following situation: two large countries, Brazil and Argentina, with unconcealed expansionist tendencies, and three small countries (geographically, demographically or economically small): Uruguay, Bolivia and Paraguay. The last two are landlocked

countries without a coast: “geopolitical prisoners” (...). Their liberation essentially depends on integration. Uruguay, strategically located on the Rio de la Plata basin, between the two large countries and the Atlantic Ocean, with the possibility of building a superport in La Paloma (for the ships of the future), could play a fundamental role in the future of an integrated region.⁵

460 This duality or bipolarity constituted, and still does to a large extent, one of the keys to understanding the political vagaries of the Plata region throughout its history. As we shall see in greater detail below, most of the conflicts arising throughout the history of the region were related to the implications of this duality, particularly to the disputes generated by the struggle for leadership between the two hegemonic States and by the limited action implemented by the three border States in their attempt to seek advantages in the disputes between their two “gigantic” neighbours and thus strengthen their interests and rights—constricted by the obvious asymmetries in the region.

A quick overview of these conflicts shows how their resolution, particularly over long periods when conflict was the prevailing rationale in the region, depended to a large extent on the forms of interrelation which in each case the two poles acquired:

5 Paulo R. Schilling, *El expansionismo brasileño* [Brazilian expansionism], Mexico, El Cid Editor, p. 133. Quotation from Eliana Zugaib, *A hidrovia Paraguai-Paraná e seu significado para a diplomacia sul-americana do Brasil* [The Paraguay-Parana waterway and its significance in Brazil's South American diplomacy], Brasília, Instituto Rio Branco, 2005, p. 42.

- i. free shipping on all inland waterways, confirmed by "fire and sword" after the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870);
- ii. the progressive creation of national states in the territory of the Plata basin, with the precarious demarcation of their respective territorial boundaries;⁶
- iii. the determination that lengthwise or cross-cutting axes should predominate, which led to the resolution of the contest regarding whether water sources (favouring Portugal first and Brazil later, after its military successes with its *bandeirantes* or army, from colonial times to the 19th century) or river mouth (favouring Argentina, for obvious geographic reasons) should prevail;
- iv. the long-standing disputes in relation to the use of the hydroelectric potential of the Plata basin;
- v. controversy surrounding how to handle issues such as environmental care or water resources;
- vi. the design of the so-called "exports corridor" and whether the landlocked countries (Bolivia and Paraguay) should face the Atlantic or the Pacific;
- vii. beyond the basin's waterways, overall engineering and their geopolitical orientation between the Atlantic and the Pacific;

6 On this subject, see most particularly, Luis Alberto Moniz Bandeira, *Argentina, Brasil y Estados Unidos. De la Triple Alianza al MERCOSUR* [Argentina, Brazil and the United States. From the Triple Alliance to Mercosur], Buenos Aires, Editorial Norma, 2004; and by the same author, *La formación de los Estados en la Cuenca del Plata. Argentina, Brasil, Uruguay, Paraguay* [The formation of the States of the Plata Basin. Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay], Buenos Aires, Editorial Norma, 2006.

- viii. the most recent controversy regarding the possibility of promoting energy exploitation and connectivity projects through oil and natural gas, as well as involvement (mainly on the part of Brazil) in the generation of biofuel or alternative forms of energy. There are many others that we could mention.

462 Upon close observation, underlying all of these points of conflict is the historical dispute between the supremacist aspirations of Argentina and Brazil (preceded by their colonial predecessors, the American empires of Spain and Portugal). At the same time, however, the resolution of each of these matters also depended on how the “large countries” interacted with the “small countries” of the region. This interaction sometimes took on the belligerent stance of military conquest, as in the War of the Triple Alliance against Paraguay, in which Mitre’s Argentina and Pedro II’s Brazilian Empire acted in unison, with Uruguay playing a bit part, or when Brazil acted on its own with very specific objectives, such as the capture of the sources of the three great rivers (Parana, Paraguay and Uruguay), which constitute the three great waterway systems of the basin. At other times, such as during the 1930-1980 period, which many authors agree in describing as the “geopolitical era,” instruments for action were implemented through diplomatic initiatives or bilateral negotiations, mainly involving the hydroelectric exploitation of the international rivers. During this latter stage, the conflict between the hegemonic states was translated into tension between bilaterality versus multilaterality. For many

reasons, which range from the geographical to the political and historical, Brazil clearly tended to prefer and defend the first strategy, whereas Argentina, much less successfully (as well as with less strategic planning), attempted to resist the encroachments of the northern giant by upholding the principles of a multilateral position. The resolution of this latest cause of tension was also closely linked to the attitude assumed, on the whole separately, despite the ineffective URUPABOL initiative, by the three border states we have mentioned.

The border states, the three "small" states of the Plata basin, did not, however, experience or handle their common situation in the same way. In the first place, it was not possible for them to do so for both geographic and historical reasons. Bolivia, landlocked since 1870, could be considered to be "the least interested country in the Plata basin",⁷ particularly—as we shall shortly see—owing to the lack of attention and to the burdensome alternatives offered to the country by the region's "giants," especially Argentina, with regard to strengthening its interests in the area of the Río de la Plata. For its part, as Bernardo Quagliotti de Bellis rightly pointed out, the "voice of history" imposed on Paraguay and Uruguay

7 Luis Dallanegra Pedraza, *Situación energética argentina y la Cuenca del Plata* [The Energy Situation in Argentina and the Plata Basin], in Luis Dallanegra Pedraza (coord. and comp.), *Los países del Atlántico Sur. Geopolítica de la Cuenca del Plata* [The countries of the South Atlantic. The geopolitics of the Plata Basin], Buenos Aires, Editorial Pleamar, 1983, p. 20.

very different—almost antagonistic—forms of acting in their nature as border countries.

Different structures and historical functions would consolidate in Paraguay its condition as a “march” area, a besieged and upright bastion of closed borders, and, in Uruguay, the natural extension of the Banda, land of its own land, a dynamic world of relationships in the gaucho area, an open border.⁸

In addition, these different forms of living and acting based on their status as border states were also related to their structural as well as circumstantial positioning with regard to Argentina and Brazil, which without a doubt was a highly conditioning factor in their initiatives and projects. In this respect and in relation to the Montevideo he well knew, Juan Bautista Alberdi had said prophetically in the first half of the 20th century:

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Montevideo’s geographical location leads to a twofold sin, which is to be necessary to the integrity of Brazil and the integrity of Argentina. Both states need it in order to complement themselves. Why is this? Because on the shores of the tributaries of the Río de la Plata, to which Uruguay is the principal key, are located the most beautiful of the Argentine provinces. As a result, Brazil cannot govern its own river provinces without the *Banda Oriental*; nor can Buenos Aires rule over the Argentine river provinces without the cooperation of that same *Banda Oriental*.⁹

This latter element of community and diversity makes it necessary to examine the political trends which each of the three border states developed separately in geopoliti-

8 Bernardo Quagliotti de Bellis, *Uruguay en la Cuenca del Plata* [Uruguay in the Plata Basin], in Luis Dallanegra Pedraza (coord. and comp.), *Los países del Atlántico Sur...* etc., *op. cit.*, p. 175.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

cal terms. In the case of Paraguay, as Eliana Zugaib rightly notes, after the disastrous War of the Triple Alliance, and once the country was able to recover slightly, it sought to alternate between Brazil and Argentina in search of better conditions for the development of its national interests. In geopolitical terms, Paraguay was particularly significant for Argentina, as the country was in possession of the key to the consolidation of the basin's longitudinal north-south axis. However, owing to various circumstances, among which the absence of specific policies and plans on the part of Argentina's rulers should be underscored, Paraguay eventually opted to throw in its lot with Brazil.

In the case of Bolivia, after its defeat in the Pacific War in 1870, in which Chile wrested from Bolivia its access to the sea, and beyond the fact that this core historical claim became henceforth the principal focus of its foreign policy, it also incorporated on several occasions a fluctuating rationale, which, however, differed from that implemented by Paraguay. Bolivia did not—as Paraguay did—enjoy the status of key country and final decision-maker with regard to which axis (north-south or east-west) would prevail in the Southern Cone region, and at the same time, lacked the hydroelectric resources that allowed Paraguay to negotiate—in very limited terms, it is true—with regard to the vast works it shares with the “greats” of the region. All of this made Bolivia extremely dependent on Brazil and Argentina. Brazil held the key to the high reaches of the Paraguay River, through which Paraguay could project its pro-

duction towards the Parana-Plata system. The northern giant continued to have the final say, with regard not only to the high plateau country (Bolivia), but also to Paraguay, as it held sway over the access of both countries to these river courses. A further alternative for Bolivia to gain access to the Atlantic was through the Santos-Arica railway, which reinforced Brazil's power. Other ways out to the Atlantic through Argentine territory were very expensive and Argentina failed to adopt a generous stance in this respect, limiting itself to granting Bolivia merely two free-trade zones in its ports.

466 In the case of Uruguay, it should be said, first of all, that throughout its history, its most significant feature has been precisely that of being a border country. The circumstances that led to its territory becoming first a boundary area between Portuguese and Spanish dominions in the region and then a "buffer state" ("a piece of cotton-wool between two pieces of glass," as it has more than once been described) between the "two greats," persistently imposed upon the country an oscillating role. However, very quickly, as we shall see, by virtue of its privileged geographic location at the mouth of the Río de la Plata and despite the prolonged absence of an oceanic port on the coast of Rocha (which for 150 years has been referred to as a strategic key), which without a doubt would have given Uruguay many more geopolitical and commercial alternatives with which to confront Brazil, the country was often able to fulfil a central role as a factor in the regional balance. As Luis Dallanegra Pedraza rightly indicates:

The role of Uruguay comes across as that of an essential area with which to maintain the "balance" of the harmonious integration of the Plata basin. To this end, the first step should tend towards the organization of its internal areas, according to established priorities and in keeping with its possibilities and socio-political and economic interests. Plans for Uruguayan reality should be based on the geopolitical possibilities of its space, seeking coincidences with other external processes of socio-economic transformation; this will provide the country with strategic security. Uruguay is obliged to implement its calling for a dynamic international policy in the region, and, internally, to achieve a coherent territorial structure with planned socio-economic development.¹⁰

In short, despite persisting, and in some cases, irreversible asymmetries between the hegemonic poles of the South American "giants" and the "small" countries of the Plata basin border areas, these smaller countries have played, and continue to play, an essential role in the destiny of the region. With them or against them, even in unison, historical perspective appears to indicate that the two "greats" cannot resolve their conflicts and much less provide the region with governance, with the many implications this involves.

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An "international Uruguay" as an historical challenge

We can state, without fear of contradiction or exaggeration, that Uruguay is a country that has been obsessed with the "outside" world and region throughout its history. It will be difficult to contradict this perception if we observe the course taken by its social history, if we note the

10 Luis Dallanegra Pedraza, *Situación energética argentina y la Cuenca del Plata* [The energy situation in Argentina and the Plata Basin], in Luis Dallanegra Pedraza (coord. and comp.), *Los países del Atlántico Sur...* etc., *op. cit.*, p. 9.

evolution of its demographic organization in the process of constructing its culture, in its collective forms of addressing politics or debates taking place in the world. As Francisco Panizza has said, the “outside” world has always embodied, for Uruguayans, an “integral image” and a “constituent regard.” The world and the region, in fact, have repeatedly represented a comparative point of reference, but have also been conceived and perceived collectively as a place from which we are “regarded” and therefore, from which we are “constituted.” As it has so often and rightly been said, Uruguay is international or it fails to be; its incorporation into the world and the region is an essential part of its national identity.¹¹

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In short, historically speaking, Uruguayans’ “inside” has been very much infiltrated by the outside, a situation in which boundaries between one dimension and the other have often been blurred. Between the last colonial period and the wars of independence, Uruguayan territory experienced a great deal of tension involving the dilemmas of autonomization or integration with regard to the region. The outcome of the revolution, whereby Uruguay became an independent state, failed to resolve this tension, a fact which was fully confirmed over subsequent decades.

This conflict, which could be described as an integral part of the collective adventure of Uruguayans, has launched and continues to launch a variety of dilemmas

11 Dr. Luis Alberto de Herrera referred to this concept in the title of one of his most influential doctrinal works. Cf. Luis Alberto de Herrera, *El Uruguay internacional* [International Uruguay], Paris, Bernard Grasset, Éditeur, 1912.

and discussions, which constitute the origin of a number of hypotheses that have given rise to principles regulating national foreign policy throughout the country's history. The first of these is related to the close link between the assertion of national independence and the unrestricted defence of International Law, as a standard of coexistence between states. In 1863, Juan José de Herrera, who was at the time minister for foreign affairs in the government of Bernardo Berro, stated firmly in the instructions he gave to Octavio Lapido for his mission as minister plenipotentiary to Paraguay, on the eve of a particularly ominous occasion:

International Law, under the safeguard (...) of which resides the sovereignty and independence of Paraguay and Uruguay, authorizes and legitimizes a mutually protective association between nations which makes up for the weakness of each in isolation. (...) The balance of power preserves the peace because it inspires the fear of war. Uruguay and Paraguay should seek this. (...) Peace is the lifeblood of the republic; domestic peace, external peace; but for the republic, peace is freedom, independence, the fullness of its sovereignty (...).¹²

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Barely two years later, and with the fratricidal war already installed in the region, in his Inaugural Address to the International Law Class at the University of the Republic, Alejandro Magariños Cervantes felt able to confirm this critical definition even more forcefully:

As weak as we are, we have no other stronghold than international law; might may decimate us with impunity, bombs may devastate our cities, extortion may exhaust our treasury; but if reason is on our side,

12 Quotation from Héctor Gros Espiell, *Uruguay: el equilibrio en las relaciones internacionales* [Uruguay: the balance in international relations], Montevideo, Instituto Manuel Oribe-Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1995, p. 56 and ff.

if we can confront the abuse of strength with a principle of international law which has been infringed, the honour of the nation will remain intact and righteous history will take it upon itself to mark upon the forehead of the aggressor, however powerful, the enduring seal of infamy. For this reason, the weak should not prevail upon their feebleness in order to commit acts that natural law condemns, nor should the strong violate the rights of those who cannot resist them.¹³

470 However, in its practical rendition in the direction of the country's foreign policy, this standard, which we of necessity share, regarding the urge to seek a prudent balance and unrestricted adherence to the regulations of International Law, gave rise to heated debate between the political parties. The *Colorado* [Red] party in general and *Batllismo* (the political followers of José Batlle y Ordóñez) in particular preferred to defend (and even protagonistically promote) universal values and principles pertaining to a new cosmopolitan order, based on a firmly Western and Pan-American conception. For its part, most of the *Nacional* or *Blanco* [White] party¹⁴ and *Herrerismo* (the political followers of Luis Alberto de Herrera) in particular opted instead for a more nationalistic and Latin American viewpoint, looking askance at any notion related to "supra-national" regulation and direct involvement with the struggle for leadership of the world's most powerful countries. As a noted example of the first position, we could refer to

13 Inaugural Address by Alejandro Magariños Cervantes to his International Law Class, in 1865, *Revista Nacional*, n. 57, July 1938, p. 123 and ff.

14 "Independent nationalism," strongly antagonistic to Herrera's movement on many issues, was often closer to Batlle's ideas in subjects related to international policy. The so-called "Rodríguez Larreta Doctrine" constitutes a paradigmatic example in this regard.

the proposal upheld by José Batlle y Ordóñez on the occasion of the 2nd International Hague Peace Conference held in 1907, which enshrined the mandatory and unrestricted nature of arbitration for the peaceful resolution of international differences; a truly radical formula that even provided for the use of force in order to compel heedless states. With regard to the second alternative, paradigmatic examples are the militant positions adopted by Luis Alberto de Herrera and Eduardo Víctor Haedo in 1940 and in 1944, against the proposed installation of North American military bases on Uruguayan soil, as well as their repeated appeals to the unrenounceable defence of the principles of self-determination and non-intervention, in the face of the frequent abuses, interference and invasions conducted by the great powers, particularly the USA in Latin America.

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However, beyond the radical nature of these discrepancies in relation to foreign policy, even at times based on these very differences and on their echoing and conflictive dynamics, the country gradually began to shape the need to achieve—not always successfully—a “state policy,” or at least a “national convergence” in this decisive area. This implied negotiations for joint action, or at least coordinated action in relation to the key challenges of international inclusion, in the face of which a country such as Uruguay needed to put firm and cohesive initiatives in place. Between Herrera’s persistent conviction regarding the imperative need for Uruguay to avoid being the “Gibraltar of the Río de la Plata” and Luis Batlle’s proud claim of selling “everything except our souls” to the People’s Republic of Chi-

na, during the Cold War's McCarthy era of the fifties, the direction was fixed for the affirmation of this new principle of foreign policy. It was not by chance that it was possible to fully achieve the positioning of this principle at the auspicious time of democratic recovery, after the opprobrium of the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1985)—which had its own special chapter in the area of foreign policy. Enrique Iglesias, foreign minister at the time, in a speech addressing all of the ministry's officials on 25 March 1985, said that,

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(...) we should resolve to achieve a genuine national policy as our main objective: the country should have, in its foreign relationships, a "national foreign policy." I believe that this is important for countries of our size; small countries such as ours should seek to maintain a foreign policy which is shared as far as possible by public opinion and the political powers. (...) When we are here, we are Foreign Service officers representing the Uruguayan nation: we are neither "blancos" nor "colorados," nor "frenteampelistas," nor "cívicos" [political parties]. We are citizens who must defend the country's prestige (...).¹⁵

A further key focal point in the international projection of Uruguayan identity is related to the priority destinations and trajectories of the country's fundamental stimulus in terms of foreign inclusion. In this context, and in relation to this point, a debate has emerged more than once—often not very well presented in simplistic terms involving a dilemma—regarding the privileged association with our

15 Enrique Iglesias, "La Cancillería y el perfil internacional de la República" [The ministry of foreign affairs and the Republic's international profile], in *Política exterior del Uruguay. Marzo de 1985-abril de 1986. Discursos pronunciados por el señor Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores Dn. Enrique V. Iglesias* [Uruguay's foreign policy. March 1985 — April 1986. The speeches of Enrique V. Iglesias, Minister of Foreign Affairs], Montevideo, MRREE-IASE, 1986.

neighbours in the region, or the preferred connection with the more developed nations of the north-western world. As Alberto Methol Ferré would say, the controversy between the "*continental borders*" and the "transatlantic borders." In this respect, the concept of "entering the world by disregarding our neighbours" has been proposed (and is still proposed) more than once in the history of several of the countries in the region. The belief that it would be more expedient for our countries to have "rich and distant friends rather than poor siblings close at hand" has constituted a formula that has found a significant number of supporters in various countries and moments in regional history.

The reduced and therefore insufficient domestic market reinforces a further premise with which to consider the problem of economic and commercial integration with the region and the world: Uruguay is forced to aim its economy in the primary—but not exclusive—direction of exports, depending increasingly on its competitive inclusion in regional and global markets. In economic terms, the "inside" cannot become a dominant factor in the dynamization of the economy; necessary communication with the "outside" also becomes inevitable in this area. According to the same perspective, Uruguay's integrationist disposition cannot be harmonized with an integrationist philosophy that conceives the bloc as an isolated and "self-sufficient zone" (neither can that of Paraguay or Bolivia). In the models it uses for the commercialization of its products, Uruguay has always aimed at "open regionalism," conceived as an instrument with which to fight as a bloc with its neighbours in search of more and better markets. This proposition, which

at other times in history might have been brought into question from a variety of perspectives, now achieves a certain level of consensus in the most widely differing camps, which does not, however, preclude the persistence of relevant and responsible debate in this area. Nobody disputes the country's exporting disposition; what does need to be discussed and looked at from different angles—and in this regard, there are many recent examples, such as the 2006 debate surrounding the possible signature of a Free Trade Agreement between Uruguay and the USA¹⁶—is “how” to achieve integration within the world and the region.

474 A consideration of Uruguay's demographic evolution also shows a trend towards establishing permanent links between “inside” and “outside.” Uruguayan society has operated to a large extent as an alluvial society, which was formed as foreigners kept arriving. This was the primary defining factor in the country's social evolution during the 19th century and part of the 20th. For many decades, and particularly most recently, Uruguay has become a country of emigration, with the emergence of a very significant “diaspora,” both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. One of the centres for the establishment of its emigrants is within the region, mainly in the closer provinces and states of Argentina and Brazil, respectively. This is not only demo-

16 On this subject, cf. Roberto Porzecanski, *No voy en tren. Uruguay y las perspectivas de un TLC con Estados Unidos (2000-2010)* [No plain sailing. Uruguay and the Outlook for a FTA with the United States (2000-2010)], Montevideo, Sudamericana Debate, 2010, 262 p.

graphic fact; it has become a central reference of our national culture and identity.

Notwithstanding the different models in conflict with each other, the different circumstances through which Uruguay has ventured in the last 50 years appear to strengthen the conviction that with regard to policies for integration with the region and the world, the nation's fortunes have prospered to a far greater extent with the adoption of pluralistic programmes than with dogmatic undertakings. As a small country submitted, additionally, to the pressure of two gigantic neighbours, Uruguay experienced its best moments when it was able to project itself as a dynamic factor of balance and intermediation between Argentina and Brazil, when it attempted flexible and logical forms of entering regional and global markets and when it set in motion pragmatic development plans combining a variety of undertakings and strategies. At the same time, the country was also able, on occasion, to take advantage of certain favourable international circumstances. However, the history of this last half century is also prodigal in adverse examples and in a lack of daring and ingenuity in promoting revitalizing strategies in these areas. More than once—and this certainly constitutes a useful warning—the country “took a nap” when all was going well, in an attitude of “bovine euphoria,” as Carlos Quijano put it.

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Much of this became particularly clear when the world of the second post-war period became fully visible in the mid-fifties. At that time, Uruguayans as well as many other peoples of the region, suddenly noticed that the world

had changed radically in terms of the perspective of Latin American interests and that in keeping with this, the mere repetition of the traditional old import substitution model had become untenable, particularly with regard to established forms of international inclusion.

In recent decades, and together with the consolidation of many of the processes and events described above, the contexts framing debate regarding the country's international inclusion strategies have changed dramatically. The uncontrollable advance of globalization is linked to a visible shift in the balance of world power, in which the Asian Pacific area—particularly China—has become the main galvanizing factor; the developed countries face often unprecedented challenges, while the new emerging countries—**476** including Brazil—begin to make their presence felt in the new international (dis)order. With multilateral scenarios in question, the process of bloc integration facing hazardous prospects and a new framework for the renewed discussion of regulations and standards in international trade and finance, world governance displays uncertainties that are as radical as they are demanding.

Twenty-one years after the signature, on 26 March 1991, of the Treaty of Asunción, which formally launched Mercosur, the worldwide escalation of what has been called a new “archipelago world order” still persists as an inevitable reference point to explain many of the vagaries of this period of globalization. Will it be enough to “latch on to Brazil's stirrup”—an expression Uruguayan president José Mujica recently coined—in the midst of these conditions,

which are as uncertain as they are challenging? How can a "shared sovereignty" be implemented within Mercosur (or Unasur), and then from that position, strengthen national independence as the indispensable mainstay of development? How can a competitive and less vulnerable international inclusion best be sought in such an unpredictable and demanding world? Are there any genuinely practicable shortcuts through which to establish more direct links to the most dynamic economic global centres? In short, what kind of an international Uruguay can we imagine for the next ten and twenty years?

*Some of the unavoidable challenges
facing Uruguayan foreign policy*

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Whilst acknowledging the particularly demanding conditions involved in the design and implementation of foreign policy in a country such as Uruguay, it is of the first importance to determine some of the focal points that should be carefully considered in this regard. We shall now summarize seven of these points, from an indubitably longer list, which in more than one way include aspects that are common to other countries in the continent:

a) The establishment of foreign policy in a country such as Uruguay must respond comprehensively and capably to a harmonized number of variables. In this respect, whereas some of the factors described below have always been on the agenda in relation to the establishment of foreign policy, it will soon be noted that providing a broad response to them within the framework of the

comprehensive design of public policy implies, in the present context, an unprecedented challenge. By way of providing a short review, some of these unavoidable factors are: the identification and harmonization of interests and options considered to be a priority; the selection of the most appropriate procedures with which to achieve objectives; the adoption, notwithstanding any short-term exigencies, of mid and long-term visions and strategies, on the basis, obviously, of the severe limitations the country faces when addressing action of this nature realistically; the establishment of settings favourable to reaching agreements, commitments and cooperation between stakeholders and institutions, both internally and externally; the adjustment of criteria and guidelines for the achievement of a high level of internal and external legitimacy for the policies deployed; the clear allocation of decision-making responsibilities in all matters concerning foreign policy, which implies being clear when explaining the chosen decision model, as well being firm and coherent in the implementation of a policy with a capacity for anticipation and coordination which—inasmuch as it constitutes a genuine focal point for a development model—cross-cuts other public policies.

b) Upholding and preserving an essentially political dimension in the final establishment of foreign policy and the strategies for international inclusion which are a priority for the state. Beyond the fact that the state should by no means be considered the only stakeholder in the deployment of a national strategy for international re-

installation, there is no doubt that it should have a leading role in this area—in agreement with and submitted to the pressure of other public and private stakeholders. In this respect, notwithstanding the strong influence of geographic, historical, economic and circumstantial factors, when establishing the courses, strategies and procedures involved in foreign policy decisions, the primacy of the political factor in defining these actions should never be lost sight of. A comparative understanding of how the great chancelleries of the world act today tends to confirm the supremacy of politics even more vigorously, in opposition to visions involving circumstance, economics or history.

c) Owing to an infinite number of reasons arising from its history, its geography, the profiles of its society; now as much as yesterday, and certainly tomorrow, Uruguay is international or it fails to be. There is no room for a self-absorbed, inward-looking Uruguay, closed to the world and with pretensions of self-sufficiency. On the basis of this fundamental definition, the main question resides in taking note (consciously, with a great deal of expert information and making an accurate and anticipatory political assessment) of the challenges as well as of the cost of what it means today to “be in the world,” to assume a dynamic and successful profile of international inclusion. This implies adopting a “world vision” which is in keeping with current demands, an appropriate and intelligent design regarding how best to adopt an approach to the world as the foreign policy stage for a country with Uruguay’s

characteristics (*how to look at the world, from what angle, with whom to share data arising from this examination in a privileged manner, etc.*).

d) In terms of choosing the content of and defining foreign policy strategies, there is no doubt that the country, as has often been said, “must play well and on all fields,” which certainly does not inhibit, but rather supports its preferential choice to base the focus of its action within and from the region. The country should deploy actions and initiatives in bilateral settings (with Argentina and Brazil, but also with the USA, Russia, China, or India), in the region (with the priority of being a generator and a factor in the balance of power of Mercosur, Unasur, the forgotten Plata basin and the broader stage—notwithstanding its complexities—of Latin America), in multilateral settings (seeking to strengthen its voice, of necessity grouped in a bloc with neighbouring countries in programmatic terms, in forums such as the WTO or within the United Nations system). Making good use of opportunities, but with mid and long-term strategies in order to avoid circumstantial mirages, the country should develop strategies on all of those stages, but always—we repeat—*within the region and never against it*, seeking the flexibility of the concept of a genuinely “open regionalism,” favouring the regional bloc as the best tool with which to fight for an improved international inclusion in the vastness of its objectives and scope. In this respect, Uruguay has no use for just any kind of Mercosur. For example, it has no use for a Mercosur which

restricts industrial development to Argentina and Brazil, which does not consistently address the matter of “asymmetry” between its party states, which is supposed to be only a “broadened zone for import substitution” and fails to take proactive action in the face of third countries or blocs, within the context of a common and vigorous external agenda. Neither, as we shall see, does Uruguay have any use for a Unasur which sees itself as an alternative rather than a complement to Mercosur, in a more flexible and confined integrationist format, which deprives of any meaning the historical undertaking of the Treaty of Asunción of March 1991. Even less has it any use for an unlimited openness which seeks to “do without the neighbourhood” (as if this were possible or desirable) or to adulterate to hollow extremes its membership in regional blocs, in order to link its fortunes (economic and commercial, but also political) to the dubious “benevolence” and “good neighbourliness” of the powerful nations, “wealthy and distant,” as described by a minister of finance who was essential to the evolution of economic policy during the Uruguayan dictatorship.

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e) Far from any dogmatic—explicit or concealed—vision or action, the definition and implementation of Uruguayan foreign policy should be able to achieve a sensible combination of pragmatism and principles, avoiding the fruitless presentation of false dichotomies between these two general approaches. Insistent rhetoric suggesting that countries only have “permanent interests”

482 tends to conceal, beyond its homespun utilitarianism, that the consideration of certain interests (generally economic and commercial) preponderates in decision-making, to the detriment of other, equally significant interests, which should be addressed complementarily (involving policy or International Law). In its heyday, Uruguay was able to build a healthy international reputation on its defence of international values, its unbending espousal of principles such as the promotion of international peace, the self-determination of all peoples and non-intervention, its fulfilment of its international obligations, its upright rejection of aggressive bids for supremacy or perverse doctrines such as “*preventive war*,” or persistent “*negationism*” in the face of heinous genocide (such as the Holocaust or that perpetrated against the Armenian population by the Turkish state in the early 20th century). The “lengthiness” of history, even in a country with a brief history, such as Uruguay, is conclusive proof that the application of a healthy pragmatism does not collide with the unrenounceable defence of principles which have contributed—and continue to do so—to the country’s positive international image. This is a resource which was built up with a great deal of effort and which even today constitutes a fundamental asset for our foreign policy.

f) The establishment and implementation of foreign policy must clearly express the image of a government and a state acting in a united, coherent and comprehensive manner. It should eschew rigid postures and adopt the

flexibility imposed by the fast-moving contemporary international stage. In the present context, foreign policy actions tainted with dispersal when the time comes to implement them, both in decision-making centres and in key stakeholders, can lead to a great many risks. The existence of ministerial supremacy or controlling positions unrelated to the chancellery, which can indirectly constitute alternative generators and centres for decision-making and action in foreign policy matters is not advisable. This kind of dispersal is counterproductive, not only for the coherence of the foreign ministry's external image, but also in achieving effective outcomes in fields such as the promotion of foreign trade, cooperation and the development of innovation in science and technology in coordination with the more developed international networks, or taking advantage of the hundreds of thousands of countrymen and women who constitute the "pilgrim homeland" of the extensive "Uruguayan diaspora" in order to use them as "proactive antennae." This defence of unity and comprehensiveness in the definition and implementation of foreign policy strategies should not be confused with any pretensions to an equally rigid and excluding monopoly on the part of the chancellery. It does, however, involve harmonizing network-based actions and projecting them coherently both abroad and with regard to their internal signals at the heart of government and of society itself. We should not forget—now more than ever—that the foreign policy of a country such as Uruguay constitutes a fundamental transmitter of all of its sustainable development strategies and that, therefore, its

undertakings should be in keeping with an accumulation of focal points which are granted equal priority internally.

g) In this “information society” era, an “intelligent chancellery,” endowed with a new style of diplomacy, a renovated management system and the ongoing training of personnel devoted to the foreign service is more necessary than ever. The skills and capacity demanded of diplomatic staff have changed and are changing constantly in this new context. The country lacks a critical mass and sufficient personnel specializing in many of the subjects emerging on the international scene (intellectual property, environmental standards, cooperation models, external market prospecting and penetration, new international negotiation skills, human rights, etc.). It is imperative to renovate and in some cases, to promote and establish very significant innovations in ongoing education and training systems for diplomatic personnel, with the consolidation of a *Diplomatic Academy* which meets the demands of the new context. In our view, in its present organizational format, the chancellery itself is in need of major structural changes, in order to achieve a more efficient internal structure that is more in keeping with the new requirements of the state reform which is under way. At the same time, it is necessary to continue along the path already initiated with regard to underpinning the professionalization and standing of the diplomatic career, with clear and universal rules which provide a guarantee for transparency and do away with, once and for all, any temptation towards cronyism and/or favouritism of any kind.

3. Uruguay and its region: the South American perspective

Changes in the perspective of Uruguay with regard to Argentina and Brazil

As we have seen, figures indicating a protracted trend revealed the consolidation of the progress of Brazil and the regression of Argentina in the dispute for the supremacy of the Río de la Plata region. Whereas Argentina defended the valid principles of multilateralism and regionalism in its handling of the basin, Brazil responded in accordance with its old developmental tradition, deploying huge efforts on construction works, without neglecting the diplomatic front. Towards the late eighties, while Brazil was able to boast of full or bilateral participation in 35 hydroelectric plants in the Plata basin area, Argentina could only lay claim to *Salto Grande*, shared with Uruguay. The very dissimilar evolution of their respective GDPs throughout the 20th century was an indication of, among other things, a very unequal use of the resources of the basin. Brazil's leadership had already been acknowledged by the USA, a country with which Brazil had developed a policy of rapprochement since World War II, in strong contrast to Argentina, which under Perón promoted a position first of neutrality and then of non-alignment.

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Furthermore, after the dramatic events the country underwent during the 2001 and 2002 crisis, Argentina has experienced objective difficulties in consolidating a genuinely consistent foreign policy, which would make a stable course workable in its strategies for international inclusion.

The harsh consequences of the economic and financial crisis which the country had to face, the no less traumatic legacy of a society which was severely impoverished and violated for many years, as well as the demands of redesigning the national rationale of political accumulation (within a heavily disengaged and confrontational framework) imposed for a long time on Argentina's agenda an unmistakable predominance of local issues over the requirements of the regional and international scenes. In addition, responses and initiatives were very often the result of calculations, visions and sometimes impositions arising from internal problems, which were given clear preference over strategies designed and planned specifically for the external and, particularly, the regional area. This strong preponderance of local policy options over foreign policy, particularly in regional matters, certainly did not contribute to fully overcoming the isolation stemming from the effects of the crisis of 2001 and 2002. All of which appears to have also been a factor in the response to the demands of the new cooperative paradigm in the bilateralism with Brazil.

As we have already noted, all of these processes have also led to radical changes in the traditional patterns of Uruguay's relationship with its two big neighbours. However, the efforts deployed in that direction by the Uruguayan state have not been entirely successful in providing a firm response to the new contexts. Although it does appear to be beyond dispute that the traditional stop-and-go rationale or the country's role as a principal element in the regional balance of power no longer provides sufficient and even pos-