

A User's Guide to a Perfect Latin American Transition

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Latin America believes in democracy always and everywhere as we have faced many dictatorships, including that of Pinochet. Latin Americans have fought against all of them and we have received the solidarity of democrats all over the world. Because of that experience, because of my conviction and for the sake of solidarity, I express on behalf of the Christian Democratic Organization of the Americas our unflinching commitment in favor of a democratic Cuba and in support of all those who fight for their freedom. That is our position and that will remain our position until the end.

The aim of the following comments is to reflect on the Chilean experience and on transitions in general, bearing in mind what is happening in Cuba and the necessity that it finally reaches democracy. As President Havel has said, it is important to think about the future. A dictator fears nothing more than the opposition thinking about the future. Contemplating the future means hitting the dictatorship where it is most vulnerable, as dictatorships are only able to live in the present. My comments concerning the achievement of a successful transition are as follows:

1. 1. Transitions must be prepared for. It is a terrible mistake to conceive the step from dictatorship to democracy as two stages that are completely different from one another. In order for a transition to exist, one needs to carry out preparation. Therefore, only a type of transition that would correspond with a peaceful and democratic ideal can be configured and achieved.

2. 2. Transitions should respond to the interests and expectations of the citizens. These may include the search for freedom, social progress and tranquility. People are afraid of chaos and therefore will not usually follow those who offer only a political path, a path that does not consider the economic and social uncertainties and demands of the population. Events in Venezuela demonstrate the validity of this statement.

3. To prepare for a transition and to make it viable requires an opposition sufficiently united, with a sufficient majority and one which is able to create an image of itself as a sufficient power alternative. This involves agreements, compromises, gestures, flexibility and a strong commitment to service. The divisions within the opposition are inherent and traditional and unfortunately it has also become traditional that dictatorships take advantage of them.

4. The unity of a majority opposition is not enough. It is also necessary that this opposition constitutes itself as an alternative to the government. It is essential that the regime, officials, the military, the international community, and citizens recognize this opposition as an alternative to the government, or more precisely as a true alternative to power. I remember that when Patricio Aylwin used to lead our opposition, a foreign friend explained it in the following manner: 'under the military regime in Chile', he told us, 'you will be a real alternative to the government when the colonels think that it may be you as a democratic government that decides their future promotion to general'. This is the simply yet direct real alternative to power. Therefore, the opposition commitment to fighting against the dictator, and the existence of a majority opposition is still not enough. It is indispensable to convince the public that the unity is real and that it is able to initiate an effective long-term government.

1. 5. In order to constitute an alternative to power, it is necessary to build a government manifesto. This implies a very good knowledge of the situation of the country, the problems of the people and what to do after the dictatorship is over. Issues may include the fate of the health system, the education system, how to improve

employment and how to promote investment. An opposition that knows what it wants to do, that eliminates uncertainty and that creates confidence and security shows itself as an alternative and thus makes transition possible.

2. 6. We have introduced here notions of a united opposition, of the establishment of an alternative to power, and the necessity of a new government manifesto. Finally a personified leadership is essential, whether one leader or — as we used to say in Chile when we had several leaders, a *primus inter pares*, the first one among those brothers who are fighting for democracy. We are told that we live in a communication society in which politics is all about image, an image that is transmitted by the people. Leaders are those that give essential confidence to the people. Thus, an opposition that does not have leadership or that is not able to define it is an opposition with difficulties in constructing a transition and a leadership who may run the risk of being unable to handle it.

3. 7. Having an answer to the crimes of the dictatorship, a situation faced by all peaceful transitions is necessary. Revenge doesn't help to create a transition but silence can only serve to facilitate it in the beginning. Through such silence, there is the risk of de-legitimizing the process and the democratic governance. This is a theme where one must attempt to integrate the ethical with the necessary and the possible, as well as defusing anger and caution. Patricio Aylwin in Chile talked about the truth and he constituted a Commission with which to establish the truth, which was very important in the Chilean transition. He also spoke

1. 8. Transition requires a constitutional project with defined central bases. To construct a democracy is an obligation and an opportunity that should therefore operate in accordance with the time. Problems should be anticipated and lessons learnt from other transitions. It is necessary to define the political regime and the electoral system, to define the situation and the role of the armed forces, to define and encourage pluralism in society and in the media. This must all be carried out simultaneously with mechanisms designed to prevent and strongly penalize corruption.

2. 9. The political opposition must be prepared and able to carry out a clear economic project. In Latin America, this means achieving growth together with equity. In order to do this, it is necessary to ensure that the economy functions well; to avoid monopolies; to believe in the market and of course in the role of the State. It must believe in the rights of workers and of entrepreneurs in a country that is open to the world and that is absent of all protectionism; a country that favors the inclusion and the unity of Latin America.

3. 10. It is necessary to have a transition with a system of strong political parties, parties with ideas and programs that are far away from any kind of populism. They must promote transparency and public financing and the openness of democratic parties to the citizen. Finally, these parties must consist of different politicians and a political style that is close to the people, that is trustworthy, austere, serious and responsible.

To summarize, transitions must be prepared for and they need to respond to the interests of the citizens. A united majority opposition is required as an alternative to the present power structure that has a concrete program manifesto containing amongst other things a response to the crimes of the dictatorship. The opposition must have an efficient and mature leadership with strong political parties and a democratic political style. Finally, it must promote a constitutional proposal and an economic and social project. In Chile, this became the vital element of our struggle against the dictatorship, in parallel with the denouncement of violations of the human rights; protests; and the restoration of freedom. A time came when we decided to construct a project for the future called the 'alternative project'. When we did, we felt that the country finally realized that the end of the dictator was both possible and close. And the cry of the Chilean people started to be "and he will fall and he will fall". And that's how it was. He fell. Thank God he fell.