



With the signing of the Foundation Charter of UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations), the twelve countries that make it up took a step of historic dimensions. This is a question, no less and no more, of enforcing the decision to reunite the parts, now separate, of a great nation.

Because that is what we are: having a common territory and a common historical origin, having a culture and beliefs that are also common, sharing a language that allows easy communication, and facing common problems, principally that of poverty.

Nevertheless, this is not the first attempt at integration. There are, as is known, earlier experiences that reveal the fact that this is a goal that has been aspired to for many decades. The fact that these objectives were not achieved raises some questions as we approach the fulfilment of a project such as UNASUR.

Where can we find the main strong points that can convert UNASUR into a successful and irreversible process? Consequently, what is the fundamental dynamic axis for a strategy of South American integration and unity? What are the principal challenges to face and to overcome in the short, medium and long term?

A good starting point is to define what we are not. Thus it is easy to conclude that we are not a military power, nor are we an industrial or technological power. And fortunately, we are not a nuclear power. What gives us internal centripetal strength and weight in the world scene is the fact that we embody an impressive reserve of natural resources: minerals, water, forests, biodiversity, land apt for the production of food, all the primary sources of energy, a population of some 394 million people occupying some 17.8 million square kilometres; these are more than sufficient resources to initiate the most ambitious plans for integral development that we can imagine. And most importantly, we have a people that are talented, who love their land, and who are hardworking and creative. We could say that we have it all. But one thing is missing: a common vision. It is a vision that we have lacked, and with this, we lack a strategy and a coherent plan that would allow us to develop that enormous potentiality that is contained in this extremely rich region.

It is a sad irony that in the midst of this immense wealth, 130 million South Americans live in a state of poverty, and among these, over 60 million in a situation of critical poverty. Meanwhile, the lion's share of much of the exploitation of resources is being taken away by huge global corporations that employ the same strategy and wield planetary control. Meanwhile, the dispersion of our countries, which UNASUR is attempting to overcome, is far from being resolved. We are hardly beginning.

A strategy and a plan, based on the similar points of our policies and our laws, that can define goals and clear means for the best use of these immense resources, is a requirement that our reality and our historical experience is plainly calling for. It is a fact confirmed by life experience that if you do not take the time to define policy in matters as important as these, others will do it for you. And they have done this under the pretext that they have the capital and the technology. And this is relatively true when you do things in the confines of your borders. But this ceases to be the case if you can bring together ideas to better exercise sovereign and permanent rights over natural resources, together with your nearest brothers. Look at the example of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an intergovernmental organization formed around the sovereign exploitation of a natural resource—petroleum—and which has been going for seventy-three years. It is an organization that brings together extremely diverse cultures and political systems, and which has managed to maintain itself in spite of conflicts, at times bloody conflicts, among some of its members. The key to this is that the governments involved have understood that together they can influence the petroleum market in a way that they could never do separately.

For the design of the policy sketched out here there is a remarkable guide: Resolution 1803 of the General Assembly of the United Nations (1), approved in 1962 and which deals with the principle of sovereign and permanent property of States over their natural resources. This resolution not only addresses the key question of property (which incidentally is already resolved in all of our Constitutions), but also that, as a sovereign right, their industrial development should be for the benefit of the peoples who are, ultimately, the real owners of these resources that are there as a result of natural processes that took place millions of years ago.

Given all this, it is not enough that States exercise the rights of property. This is an imperative, to which must be added the scientific and technological development to minimize the impact of human intervention on nature. And it is necessary to go further. It is not sufficient to design and apply rational policies for the primary phase. We need to elaborate and bring to fruition rational policies that expand the possibilities of productive employment, employment that is stable and of such quality that it may effectively combat unemployment and poverty. To this we must add the need for scientific and technological development that lessens the weight of work, increases productivity and reduces environmental impact.

A policy of this sort, outlined here in general aspects, will demand a substantial mass of resources. This in turn requires gathering contributions of all member countries for the development of institutions such as the Banco del Sur, as well as common policies for negotiations when extra-regional financing is needed.

Natural Resources as the dynamic axis of UNASUR strategy

Escrito por Alí Rodríguez Araque
Miércoles, 21 de Mayo de 2014 13:31 -

So we are faced with the enormous possibility of leaving behind the nightmares of poverty for so many, and of providing a vigorous and growing impetus to the integral development of South American human beings, and by extension, of making a contribution to humanity itself, not as an abstraction, but as a material and spiritual reality. Obviously, this also confronts us with the problem of distribution, but that is an issue that we must take up on another occasion.

(Translated for ALAI by Jordan Bishop)

- Alí Rodríguez Araque is the General Secretary of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

* This text is part of the magazine America Latina en Movimiento, No. 493 March, 2014, titled: "Ciencia, tecnología e innovación en la integración suramericana" (Science, technology and innovation in South American integration). <http://alainet.org/publica/493.phtml>

[1] <http://www2.ohchr.org/spanish/law/recursos.htm>