**Ibero-America at the international stage**

University of Maryland

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Buenos días a todos. Estoy convencida de que en un país casi bilingüe como EE.UU. y en una Universidad con clara vocación latinoamericana, casi todos hablan español o portugués. Pero para facilitar la comunicación, I will shift to English. Let me start saying that it is a pleasure to be here today at the University of Maryland, founded in 1856 and selected among the best public high level schools of the United States.

First, I would like to give my special thanks for the kind invitation to Professor Charles Caramello, Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Provost for Academic Affairs with a tremendous record of research and management, and to Professor Saúl Sosnowski, Associate Provost for International Affairs, author of several books on Latin America and founder of the Latin American Studies Center. It is an honor to speak to such a selected group of high level academics, most of them in some way related to Latin America or Ibero-America.

Dear Charles Caramello, dear Saúl Sosnowski, distinguished professors, the famous Mexican writer Octavio Paz once said that “The issue of development is closely linked to our identity: who, what and how we are? We are nothing, except from a relation, something that cannot be defined by its own but only as part of history”. It seems to me that this would be a good description of the Iberoamerican Community: it represents a common identity and a shared history between 22 countries: 19 Latin American and three Europeans: Andorra, Spain and Portugal.

It is my mission to present the Ibero-American Community of Nations, founded in 1991, to the world. I think that it is particularly important to bring the Ibero-American space closer to the United States, host of more than 50 million Hispanics, most of them of Mexican origin. To reach this community -that shares with us the same language and a similar cultural background-, and including the Hispanics in our programs and projects, is one of the most prominent international challenges of the Community that I represent.

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Today, Latin America holds Summits with many partners. Next year will take place the Summit of the Americas, the EU-LAC Summit, and a high level political forum with China, the second global power that has become the main export market for Brazil, Chile and Peru and a key investor and debtor of all Ibero-American countries including Spain and Portugal.

But if we go back to the past, today’s Summitry started in 1991 with the first Ibero-American Summits, following a shared initiative between Spain and Mexico. At that time, the Ibero-American Summits were the only game in town. The consolidation of democracy, still fragile in many of our countries, and development were the two principle goals of the Ibero-American Summits.

At that time, we decided to hold annual meetings and to create a community based on mutual respect, without political conditionality (Cuba is an original member) and hegemonic aspirations. But I have to stress that, different to many other Summit systems, due to long-standing political, cultural and economic relations between Portugal, Spain and Latin America, Ibero-America has been a reality before 1991. It was the spirit of community that motivated the institutionalization of Ibero-America and not the inverse path. Today, several Ibero-American organizations – some of them created many decades before - are under the umbrella of the General Secretariat based in Madrid with offices in different Latin American countries.

Although Spain was a key actor at the very beginning, recent power shifts towards the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, led to a more prominent role of regional and global actors like Brazil and Mexico. In fact, before I assumed the Secretariat, we decided to renovate the format, contents and power relations within the Community: in the future, the financial commitment of Latin America will increase substantially, Summits will be held every two years and, under my leadership, we will concentrate on three major topics: social cohesion, knowledge, and culture.

These three issues have not been selected by coincidence, but are part of a global strategy: increase our level of international integration by soft power. In this case, our shared identity is the main source of soft power. The history of international relations often proved that cultural links are more enduring than political cooperation between partners with different backgrounds. A recent example was the alliance between Cuba and Russia that did not survive the end of the Cold War, while its strong relation with Spain has been maintained also in times of diplomatic tensions.

Our advantage at the new international stage, characterized by a power shift away from the West to the South East, is cooperation between equals (one country, one vote). This means consensus (instead of hegemony), the existence of a common cultural space (a market of literature, language, theatre, cinema), and the “acervo iberoamericano” – the commitments to implement 35 common programs defined in more than 20 years of the Ibero-American Community. Another plus are shared values (basically four: democracy, human rights, peace and development) without any type of conditions and impositions.

But we have to recognize that, in a changed global and regional context - of the BRICS and new Latin American initiatives like CELAC, the Pacific Alliance and Unasur –, Ibero-America is not any more the “only game in town” but part of a new big global puzzle whose structures are not yet defined. But our role in this game is clear: we are not an economic powerhouse (although we share strong and solid economic relations) nor do we represent hard military power, but we are a cultural brand with a common identity and communitarian spirit.

The following figures confirm my argument. Together, our 22 countries represent: 20% of global oil reserves and 4.3% of natural gas; a total market of 650 million people that share two languages, 10% of world exports; 6% of global military expenditures, a GDP of 9,5%; and an economic growth of 3% in 2013.

At our last Summit in Panama, in November 2013, we agreed to “maintain a dialogue on issues of the international agenda” and to “identify convergences at the international stages”. What has been done to improve the position of Ibero-America at the international stage? Let me first mention our institutional performance.

An important step towards internationalization was the creation of the Ibero-American Secretariat in 2005, under the leadership of the former Director of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Enrique Iglesias, who transformed Ibero-America in an international brand and whose leadership has been fundamental “to globalize” Ibero-America.

A second step was the decision to apply for a status of an observer to the United Nations. Since 2005 the Ibero-American Secretariat is an international organization linked to the United Nations. That gives us the opportunity to adopt common positions at all UN agencies.

As a third step was the establishment of close partnerships with a series of international organizations (BID, CAF, EC, OIM, etc.) and the inclusion of nine countries in and outside our regions as associated observers (Japan, Belgium, Italy, France, Morocco, the Netherlands, Philippines, Japan and Haiti).

These three steps increased our international visibility and our space for common global action. Once created the formal or institutional conditions, we are now able to think about developing international positions and initiatives at the international stage.

If we look back to our Summit Declarations and further commitments, there are five key elements that allow us to define common positions:

1. The rejection of unilateral sanctions like those of the United States against Cuba and other countries.
2. The political will to readapt the international financial architecture and other international organizations to today’s power shift towards Asia and Southern states.
3. The commitment to participate actively in the definition of the post Millennium goals including new obligations to stop climate change and find innovative paths for sustainable development.
4. The decision to explore common formula (taking into account Latin America’s long experience with financial crisis) to create a sustainable economic growth without abandoning social commitments and deepening social inequity.
5. The regulation and promotion of migration flows between Europe and the Americas. This said, let me stress that we are following closely the US debate on the reform of the migration law proposed by President Obama. We could offer our experience with similar initiatives and we will certainly make visible progress towards an Ibero-American citizenship.

If we take these five elements, our strength at the international stage lays in soft power, mediation and consensus-building. The Ibero-American community confirms that culture represents a third way of international power (aside from military and economic capacities):

1. If the world would be divided in different civilization like Samuel Huntington once did, Ibero-America is a hybrid or bridge between the Latin American and the Western culture – this is a strategic advantage compared to other homogeneous communities.
2. Including the Hispanics in the United States, we represent a language community, a space of knowledge and an international pressure group of more than 650 million people.
3. Linked by our cultural heritage, Ibero-America is a bridge between Europe and Latin America and a bridge between Latin America and the United States.
4. Our shared identity is a vaccine against the negative effects of globalization that should be seen as an opportunity but also as a threat to cultural communities and obliges us to reinforce our identity.
5. In midst of trade negotiations between the two mega-blocs called TTIP and TPP, Ibero-America is part of both: Portugal and Spain participate in a future Transatlantic EU-US deal, and Chile, Mexico and Peru in the Trans-Pacific Partnership process. The Ibero-American multinational companies are another important link to both multilateral trading blocs.

In a constantly changing world, Ibero-America represents a solid cultural alliance between similar countries. This does not mean that there are no differences. Our motto is “united in diversity”. Our method is consensus-building between states with different political systems, ethnic compositions and economic projects.

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