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"RECEIVE A SHEIKH AT YOUR
TABLE" THE SUMMIT OF SOUTH
AMERICAN-ARAB COUNTRIES

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"RECEIVE A SHEIKH AT YOUR TABLE" THE SUMMIT OF SOUTH AMERICAN-ARAB COUNTRIES

Abstract:

The number of international organizations is increasing more and more in South America. It is a process in which we want to see the desire to enthrone the dialogue as the only procedure to resolve conflicts and pursue new paths of cooperation in all sectors. All are welcome. However, we must also evaluate and analyze the fruits collected by each of these organizations, and there may be different point of views. Particularly, the Summit of South American-Arab countries can become one of the most successful, once peace returns to Arab countries that are currently in conflict.

Keywords:

South American Summit, Arab Countries.

It seems that Brazil is still trying to lead South America's international policy; once more it has been demonstrated at the recently closed Summit of South American-Arab countries (ASPA), who had a meeting the past 2 and 3 of October.

Taking Brazil's initiative, in 2005 ASPA opened its sessions for the first time in Brasilia; in 2009 the meeting took place in Qatar; the third edition should have taken place in Lima in 2011, but was cancelled due to the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt.

On this ocasión, ASPA has gathered 22 representatives of the Arab countries and 11 American representatives. On the American side, the presidents of Peru, Ollanta Humala, Chile, Sebastián Piñera, Colombia, Juan M. Santos, Ecuador, Rafael Correa, Bolivia, Evo Morales, Uruguay, José Mujica, Guyana, Donald Ramotar, Argentina, Cristina Fernández, and Brazil, Dilma Rousseff. The President of Venezuela couldn't attend and the President of Paraguay wasn't invited. On the Arab side, the King of Jordan, Sheikh Al-Thani, the President of the Lebanon, M. Sleiman, the President of Tunisia, M. Marzouki, Iraq's Chancellor, H. Zebari, and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, N. Araby, among others.

The sessions at the Lima Summit took place under the motto "A Culture of Peace, Inclusion and Development", and as expected the political issues raised a pandemonium.

The Peruvian President, Ollanta Humala, was responsible for closing the Summit and introducing the "Lima Declaration", which, along with other things, considers:

- Searching for a negotiated resolution for the Syrian crisis, because, according to the Secretary-General of the Arab League, "no initiative has been effective and, honestly, the outcome of the crisis can be catastrophic not only for Syria, but for the whole area".

- The expectations and hopes of both regions about the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the respect to the humanitarian law and the repudiation of all kinds of terrorism.

- It's positioned against the violence and abuses committed in the name of religion; at the same time it condemns the lack of respect and the offenses to the religious sensitivity of the people and nations in general.

- The Declaration supports the right of the Palestinian people to the independence, and to live in peace and security within recognized and respected borders.

- It doesn't leave out the processes of democratic institutionalization and the practices of social inclusion in all countries.

For its part, Argentina took the opportunity offered by the Summit to request for a support declaration in the conflict that has with England about the Malvinas Islands. Apparently, Argentina didn't elaborate enough its claim, a fact of which the representative of the United

Arab Emirates, who have a dispute with Iran over the Islands of Abu Musa, took advantage and made certain comments that prevented the unanimity.

Even though his words are not compiled in the Declaration, in the closing event Ollanta Humala cleverly referred to the Malvinas Islands issue, the conviction of the attempted coup d'état in 2009 of the police in Ecuador, and to the inviolability of the diplomatic seats, making a clear reference to the political asylum that Ecuador grants to the WikiLeaks founder, Julián Assange, in its embassy in London.

Furthermore, Evo Morales, in the chapter of social affairs, demanded the decriminalization of the *acullico* (chewing of coca), a traditional and ancestral practice in Bolivia.

The economic content in the Summit, more interesting than the political, was demonstrated in the final declaration, but especially in a parallel business forum that gathered more than 500 entrepreneurs of both world areas.

In this regard, according to the *Doing Business 2012* of the World Bank, the American participants, looking for Arab investments in oil, infrastructures..., can't forget that while Chile, Brazil, Colombia and Peru offer multiple administrative facilities to foreign investors, in Bolivia and Venezuela they have more difficulties.

We can imagine the interest of Arab countries to invest in America, because we must bear in mind the fact that the South American and the Gulf market represent 5.4 trillion dollars of the GDP, with a population of 750 million inhabitants. Particularly, Brazil can boast that, since the celebration of the first ASPA Summit, its trade with the Arab countries has increased by 138.9 %, going from 10.5 to 25.1 million dollars, figures that are clearly not disposable.

The Summit's conciliatory facade was on the verge of disappearing when several days before the opening, the President of Chile, Sebastián Piñera, stated before the Assembly of the United Nations that Chile would promote respect for the treaties between his country, Peru and Bolivia.

Once arrived to Lima to attend the Summit, Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, answered accusing Chile of having become "a danger for the region". Sebastián Piñera responded that, as President of Chile, his duty is to defend "the Chilean sovereignty, territories, seas and sky". And before ending the year, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, at the request of both parties, will evacuate its opinion about the dispute between Peru and Chile concerning their sea border in the Pacific.

However it was Dilma Rousseff, the Brazilian President, who caught most of the attention with her intervention in the Summit, holding responsible, in what it seemed a reference to the United States, the developed countries for the difficulties of the international economy;

she stated verbatim: "We need to strengthen the economic coordination and develop our cooperation on increasingly equitable and solidarity terms. South American and Arab countries are to ensure that the turbulences of the international economy are not additional obstacles to our development". And later: "the cumulative effect of these expansionary monetary policies, designed with exaggerated austerity, exports the crisis to the rest of the world and doesn't solve the serious problems of the developed countries, like the high unemployment and the desperation. When we reduce the exportations of our developing countries, we impose a disguised protectionism".

Brazil is on its way to become the international voice of South America, given the fact that Argentina hasn't gained any degree of political stability and doesn't take off economically; it's clear that Brazil knows that, at least apparently, it must provide a counterpoint to the United States although without breaking the relationship with this country.

On the other hand, Brazil doesn't trust completely the Asia-Pacific Alliance's movements, especially by Chile and Peru, and less by Ecuador and Colombia, having started the search for Asian markets. Therefore, Brazil has undertaken the huge task of building channels of communication through the Amazon, in order to link the Peruvian and Ecuadorian coasts after crossing the Andean plateaus; these communications would isolate Chile which, as it is known, has a chronic shortage of energy sources¹.

For this reason, the rigid position of Chile regarding Peru and, especially, Bolivia is not clear, when addressing, already in the XXI century, the disputes with these countries about the borders, since the so-called War of the Pacific on the XIX century.

However, we still don't know what position will adopt Hugo Chávez (recent winner of the Venezuelan elections) at the international level, but we don't expect a change. Indeed, achieving the international leadership in this area, in a dispute with Mexico and Brazil, Chávez will be supported by Cuba, who is pleased with the reelection. This fact prevents Cuba's isolation in the area and at the same time enables them to continue receiving Venezuelan oil free.

ASPA is not going to have any meeting until 2015, this time in Saudi Arabia, even though on the first half of 2013, the ministers of economy of the association will hold a conclave in La Paz.

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¹ We are talking about the action Brazil has undertaken to link the Atlantic with the Pacific in "J. Edwards, Vargas Llosa y el Movimiento Ciudadano Concordia Perú-Chile", published on 03.10.2012, and will also be developed further in the "Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2012", coming soon.