

The road to regional integration

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Our countries share a common vision: To guarantee and promote an environment of peace, prosperity, stability and cooperation that favours the human development of our peoples

Throughout the duration of Guatemala's Pro Tempore Presidency (PTP) of the Central American Integration System (SICA) our core policies have been directed towards securing a brighter future for all constituent nations of this regional grouping, which will allow us to address postmodern challenges with decisive and long-term solutions.

The level of commitment of this Presidency has been absolute. This is evident in the measures taken to continue strengthening political and economic cooperation between the actors. To continue promoting justice, security and development in our region, facing all the challenges that current international conditions bring to bear.

We will spare no effort in continuing to hold permanent consultations, in particular on those topics that are among the highest priorities for our region, such as holistic security across the whole of Central America, integral risk management, mitigating natural disasters and climate change, promoting sustainable tourism, and essential political coordination in both regional and international fora. We are all well aware that we need to work jointly in all areas related to the security of our Member States, including regional cooperation, and trade negotiations with third countries and trading blocs.

Recently, our integration process has made huge advances that will assist in its consolidation. In this way, the face of Central American integration has changed significantly in the last few years. We can highlight in particular the progress made in the establishment of the customs union between Guatemala and Honduras. This step will undoubtedly bring a faster pace to the dynamics of our trade relationship and, we hope, expand rapidly to include the remaining countries of the region.

It is of the utmost importance to stress that our countries share the same vision: "To guarantee and promote an environment of peace, prosperity, stability and cooperation that favours the human development of our peoples." This vision is framed within our fundamental principles. These have as their objective that the region should consolidate as an area of freedom, peace, democracy and development. To maintain the harmonious and brotherly relations that characterise us, and to

further strengthen our sub-regional links is one of the strategic goals of SICA.

It is important to remember that the Central American Integration System (SICA) has been a political instrument for the integration of the bloc since the 13th of December 1991, when the Protocol to the Charter of the Organisation of Central American States (ODECA) – known as the Tegucigalpa Protocol – was concluded, modifying the original text of 1951. The resulting efforts will continue until we reach a full integration of the Isthmus and achieve better living standards for all in this wonderful region of this Hemisphere.

The Pro Tempore Presidency will be handed over during the last week of June, in the colonial city of Antigua Guatemala, with the participation of the Presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic, as well as the special participation of the Presidents of Mexico and Colombia.

Among the notable highlights of Guatemala's PTP, the first SICA-Spain Summit was held on the 9th of March 2015, with the presence of Spain's Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy. Last January, the President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, visited Guatemala to engage in a dialogue about economic, security and foreign policy.

Also during the Guatemalan Presidency, on the 10th of April we celebrated the SICA-USA meeting, on the fringe of the Summit of the Americas held in Panama, with the participation of US President Barack Obama.

As I mentioned earlier, Guatemala and Honduras have initiated the customs union process, which should be concluded by December 1st 2015. Both countries, under their Presidents' mandate, are leading the Central American customs union, with the purpose of facilitating trade and the free movement of people.

In light of the activities mentioned above, we can foresee a promising future, with unlimited opportunities for all the constituents of the Central American Integration System. The twenty-first century, without doubt represents the best platform for the integration, peace and security of all Central Americans.

In parallel with SICA, the XV Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Tuxtla Mechanism for Dialogue and Cooperation will also be held in Antigua Guatemala on the 26th of June 2015. There, Guatemala will reinstate its commitment to support the dynamics of Mesoamerica on all fronts, as we face the shared risks, roadblocks and challenges under the current global situation.

My Government's commitment springs from the inherent capacity of Mesoamerica to respond to any threats and opportunities that may lie ahead for all the citizens of our region, given our common past, our shared present, and a future wherein we have a chance to build peace with security and harmony. **■**

