

Mexico – Poland

TOWARDS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



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2018 marks the 90th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Mexico and Poland. A year earlier, during the state visit to Mexico, Polish President Andrzej Duda signed with his Mexican counterpart, Enrique Peña Nieto, the Joint Declaration "Towards a strategic relationship between Mexico and Poland" which establishes the agreement to “found a solid base on which a more integral and reinforced relationship can be developed”. Are both the countries closer to the strategic relationship, as postulated by this document?

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The evolution of the relation between Mexico and Poland has been the result of a mixture of factors where the political will and strategic vision have played a significant role. If the main characteristic of the first 75 years was to seek to give meaning and form to the relationship, the next 5 years were portrayed as the moment where the aspiration to find each other was seeded. The last decade can be described as a period of intense work and dialogue that led to an exponential growth of the relationship in all its different fields that allowed both sides to decide to direct its efforts towards a strategic partnership.

Bilateral relations

Bilateral relations are as complex as they are indispensable. Each bilateral relationship between a pair of countries has its characteristics and its particular taxonomy that goes from a relationship that is built or is in the process of construction, to a relationship that is just managed and carried out by inertia, to associations that are in a process to be deepened to build a partnership.

Likewise, Cottey and Gottwald detail a noteworthy description of the elements that should be considered in the institutionalization of a relationship in order to brand it as a long-term one:

- 1. A multi-level relationship, involving dialogue from the highest political leaders through mid-level officials to lower level ones;*
- 2. A multi-sector relationship involving dialogue and cooperation across many, indeed most, areas of public policy;*
- 3. A multi-actor relationship involving not only governments and state/EU institutions, but also non-state actors, in particular businesses and civil society groups.*

From the reading of multiple joint communiqués and statements, declarations and memoranda of understanding between diverse countries that have established strategic partnerships or have expressed the will to build one, it can be concluded that what distinguishes these forms of partnerships from other levels of relations are the following attributes, let's say "guiding principles":

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- I. There is an explicit and tangible determination to build a long-term relationship bound by the principles of mutual trust, respect, benefit, and interest;
- II. Both parts share common core values and concur, if not entirely, on an important number of issues of the international and multilateral agenda;
- III. Frequent contacts at various levels, among diverse actors on a large variety of topics (bilateral, regional and global) and mechanisms for a fluid and intense dialogue;
- IV. It is endowed with an agenda of concrete actions in priority areas, such as political dialogue, trade and investment, tourism, science and technology, education and culture, among others;
- V. Can have diverse objectives: while some of them driven by national interests, others may have incentives in building good neighbourly relations, conservation of historical ties, consolidation of economic issues or building a security partnership to pay attention to common threats;
- VI. Requires a bilateral legal framework that gives coherence and logic to the efforts to deepen the relation;
- VII. It is expected that the economic relationship transcends the actions of governments, who, to make this possible, offer the aforementioned legal framework and collaboration mechanisms that motivate and guarantee trade and investments in both ways to boost and modernize their economies;
- VIII. The use of cultural expressions and tourism as bridges to strengthen mutual understanding among their societies;
- IX. The promotion of greater exchanges and cooperation in the fields of science and technology, education and culture; and
- X. Should be inserted in a greater scope: a coherent strategy of diversification and deepening of relations. It is important to note that the establishment of a strategic relationship is only a first step. Its survival and continuity are due to the real commitment by the parts to provide it with content for its real implementation.

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Evolving relationship

As Marcos Pablo Moloeznik pointed out: *"The encounters and disagreements that, throughout little more than eight decades of political relations, present Poland and Mexico, should be valued both in the light of history (time) and of geopolitics (relative position-space) ... "*

From a historical perspective, the emergence of Mexico as an independent nation (1810-1821) concurs relatively in time with the disappearance of Poland as a sovereign state in the European context, derived from the partition of 1795 to 1918, for which, *"the Polish-Mexican relations depended strictly on the policy that the occupiers of Poland - Russia, Russia, and Austria - established with the young Mexican Republic"* (Smolana, 2018). Later, in the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1928, we found two nations living internal processes that deserved special attention: on one hand, Mexico was in a rearrangement process derived from the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, and Poland, was still an incipient nation after recovering its sovereignty at the end of the First World War. Likewise, the Second World War and, at the end of it, the geopolitical priorities of both countries in the bipolar order that arose, hindered the development of intense bilateral relations. It is then, that until recent dates, from the rearrangements of the international order at the end of the Cold War in 1991 that the bilateral relations have been steadily strengthened.

Events that can be considered paradigmatic in this change of focus are, on the one hand, the economic transformation of Mexico derived by the signature of the North American Free Trade Agreement (in force since 1994) and the Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and the European Union (in force since 2000) and, on the Polish side, the transition to an open market that started in 1990 and its accession to the European Union in the 2004 enlargement.

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The 2004 visit (14th of May) by the then president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, was the first one received by Poland after its accession to the EU, which occurred just 2 weeks before the State Visit (1st of May). On that occasion, the then president of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, commented that the inclusion of Mexico in NAFTA and Poland belonging to the European Union meant that there were enormous possibilities between both countries. Also, Kwaśniewski noted that the first 75 years of bilateral relations “*were not wasted time*” (Presidency of the Republic, 2004) highlighting contacts at the official level and the cultural collaboration.

And, in fact, they were not wasted times. It was during these first 75 years that happened one of the most important and paradigmatic moments in the bilateral relation. In December 1942, the then Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile, Władysław Sikorski, visited Mexico where was received by President Manuel Ávila Camacho and signed together an agreement in which Mexico offered assistance to refugees, that led to the arrival to the country of 1,434 Polish refugees that found home in the hacienda of Santa Rosa in León, Guanajuato.

Fox reunion with Kwaśniewski marks the first State Visit of a Mexican president to Poland since 1963. From the words of president Kwaśniewski, we can see the will to evolve a relation that at the moment didn't have the desired regularity. Going back to the aforementioned “guiding principles”, the aspiration for a deeper relationship can be identified in Kwaśniewski message: “*We are very interested in developing the Polish-Mexican collaboration in international fora...*” (II)¹; “*So, too, I want to inform you that we are very interested in the fact that Mr. President's visit has continuity, that this continuity in government contacts at the level of relationship exchange is expressed. I hope so.*” (I, III)

From the Mexican side, the then president Fox declared: “*For us it is an honor to be here, in Poland, and to be able to talk about the bilateral relationship between our two countries; to be able to consider the challenges that lie ahead, especially at this moment where we see a clear conver-*

¹ From this moment, the Roman Numbers between Parentheses refer to the “guiding principles” elaborated in the previous section of this article.

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gence of our two countries, given that we are both part of the two largest trade and market blocs in the world.” which completes on the perspective mentioned above about that the belonging of both Mexico and Poland to their regional trade blocs were at the time a trigger to provoked the approach.

Fox added about the encounter: “...we have decided... to work together; have our own Agreement, have our own association, in order to take advantage of the mutual advantages offered by these two major markets; so that we can be a true bridge of encounter and a bridge to build a greater presence of our countries - in the case of Mexico - in the European Union; in the case of Poland, in North America and in Latin America.” (I, V); “An approach that allows us, through the dialogue, to build solid roads for the human and social development of our regions, to boost economic growth and the generation of jobs, and to continue our solidarity and our activity and presence in the fight against terrorism and for world security and peace.” (II, IV, VII) and “We have spoken, precisely, in detail of the steps we have to take to increase trade between our two countries, as is the case of the Agreement on Tourism that we have just signed and how is this Commission that will work the details so that we can - very concretely - move forward in this regard.” (IV, VIII)

From both presidents’ interventions, a “will” to build something “beyond” can be identified. Still, the relation required greater institutionalization and more frequent contacts; a diversity of issues in its bilateral dialogue and the construction of its legal scaffolding.

That is to say, at this moment it was clear that both countries had a friendly relationship in which, unfortunately, the political dialogue had been sporadic and, therefore, the economic, cultural and cooperation exchanges - among others – scarce. The 2004 visit was one of the first moments that Mexico and Poland recognized each other as a partner-to-be, with enormous potential for the growth, between other spheres, of their commercial relations and for the promotion of reciprocal investments.

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Last decade

In 2008, during the reunion between the then president of Mexico Felipe Calderon and the then Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk, both statemen discussed “the importance of strengthening trade and investment, taking full advantage of the potential of the Mexico-European Union Free Trade Agreement” (Presidency of the Republic, 2008). Currently, the annual trade between Mexico and Poland is more than 1,200 million USD while, between 1999 and 2016, “Bilateral trade increased twentyfold, from just \$50 million USD to over a billion USD” (Presidency of the Republic, 2017).

President Duda's visit to Mexico in 2017 was in this progression, an invaluable opportunity to supplement those missing elements and check all the boxes of the “guiding principles” essential to building a partnership. Nevertheless, before the visit, previous steps were taken to pave the road for a successful encounter and illustrates that this strengthening is part of an integral scheme of diversification (X).

First, in the document “Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012-2016”, published by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2012, it is stated that Latin America is “an important area for Poland to engage in”² and Mexico was mentioned as one of five countries in the region with which we had to develop economic relations. Second, in July 2016, the then Ministry of Economic Development of Poland declared that Mexico was one of the five priority (prospective) extra European markets for Poland (the others being Algeria, India, Iran, and Vietnam). Third, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Witold Waszczykowski, presented the 9th of February of 2017 on the Polish parliament the priorities of Polish diplomacy, where he declared: “In the coming year we want to give a strategic dimension to our partnership with Mexico, which will be the purpose of the Polish President’s planned visit to this country” (Embassy of Poland in Mexico, 2017).

² <https://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/d31571cf-d24f-4479-af09-c9a46cc85cf6:JCR>(accessed the 10th of July, 2018)

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Correspondingly, from the Mexican side, the “Sectorial Program of Foreign Relations 2013-2018” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs details that “Mexico has the challenge to deepen and consolidate relations with the European Union and its member states, as well as explore new possibilities of exchange with other countries of the continent.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, 2013) (X).

A new approach to the relation was committed in 2015 by the then ministers of foreign affairs of both countries who agreed to give a boost to bilateral relations and decided to work together to develop a document with recommendations aimed at achieving this goal: "Recommendations for strengthening the relationship between Mexico and Poland" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, 2016), which involved the participation and contributions of numerous governmental offices of both governments and also representatives of private sector and universities.

The aforementioned document recommends, among other things, that “Poland and Mexico must promote a regular and extensive exchange of information and frequent consultations at different levels...” stating that the “Political dialogue will be the platform for the development of bilateral relations in other areas” and advocates for the creation of “alternative mechanisms for the reciprocal promotion of trade and the investments” as well.

Joint declaration

With this positive environment, the 2017 presidential signature of the Joint Declaration "Towards a strategic relationship between Mexico and Poland" was not a sudden and unexpected outcome. That is why it clearly points out the necessary determination (I) to build a long-term relationship and to move forward in agreements and specific projects.

The joint declaration comprises in its different paragraphs, references to all the ingredients that help the relationship to evolve into a partnership. The “agreements” between the presidents speak about their “commitment to democratic values and Human Rights, and their common aspiration for a more egalitarian, socially responsible, and secure world” (II); the value “of maintaining a

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high-level political dialogue on a regular basis...” and the “...mutual aspiration to raise the profile of bilateral relations in all aspects” (III)..

Furthermore, the declaration includes concrete actions in priority areas (IV): commitments on investment and bilateral trade -the Presidents considered that strengthening the economic ties is essential for the further growth of the relationship (V) - as well as educational, cultural and technological cooperation.

It has been noted before that any partnership requires a legal framework (VI). The declaration not only mentions the commitment to strengthen the bilateral legal framework through the negotiation of instruments that can foster cooperation in different areas but also during the 2017 visit, 11 legal instruments were signed, 6 of them to build up and give certainty to the trade and investment exchanges (VII) including the creation of a high-level working group between the ministries of trade to increase bilateral trade and develop economic cooperation. Likewise, the Executive Program of the Cooperation Agreement in the Field of Education and Culture was subscribed (VIII, IX) and it was recognized that “sports and tourism are important vehicles to increase contacts between our societies and promote cultural awareness” and was “agreed to encourage actions aimed at increasing mutual tourist flows and cooperation” (VIII).

In the messages from the presidents in the 2017 visit, contrasting them with the statements of the meetings of 2004 and 2008, a renovated spirit can be perceived: The previous narrative that mentioned the need to identify each other as partners and that urged greater mutual knowledge to take advantage of the potential that the relationship had, shifted onto the recognition of the partnership and the invitation to strengthen it.

From the Mexican side, President Peña Nieto declared that the visit confirmed “the ties of friendship and the great coincidences of our nations to promote economic, cultural and educational exchanges”, that the signed joint statement was an indication of the excellent moment in our relationship. President Peña Nieto added: “...with a vision of the future, we move towards the establishment of a strategic relationship that benefits both societies” (Presidency of the Republic, 2017).

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Likewise, President Duda, in an intervention that can help identify motivations and objectives (V) said in the Senate of Mexico that “Poland wants to see a world that is built on cooperation and security” commenting that “Mexico was an important partner in pursuing this goal” (Website of the President of the Republic of Poland, 2017). He also mentioned that his presence in the Senate of Mexico was a sign that the relations were entering a new level (Senate of Mexico, 2017).

From President Duda’s intervention, the following declaration that shows the renewed atmosphere should be observed: “It is not geography that decides whether countries or societies feel close; that depends on people, their openness, their cordiality, their interest, common ambitions, objectives and values, and in this sense, I can say that Poland and Mexico are neighbouring countries”.

Strategic partnership

It can be said that the main objective of the association of Mexico with Poland is to continue working for the construction of this strategic relationship, in which Poland would become a priority partner of Mexico in the Central European region and Mexico will become the strategic partner of Poland in Latin America. The encounter of the presidents during the State Visit to Mexico in 2017 was decisive in this progression.

Also, the joint declaration itself has become an institutional piece of great importance in the future deepening of the partnership, which together with the instruments signed during the visit that give shape to a more solid legal scaffolding, has triggered greater spaces for interaction.

The relations between both countries are strengthened day by day in all areas: new actors have joined the bilateral relationship, as is the case of the parliaments of both countries who have created legislative friendship groups; also, high-level visits have been made by authorities from different ministries, to give a boost to the economic relation and trade; Polish tourism to Mexico has increased considerably (exceeding in 2017, for the first time, the figure of 50,000 Polish tourists)

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caused both by promotion and a better connectivity between countries; and contacts between universities and institutions of higher education have expanded considerably as well as technical and scientific cooperation. Likewise, Mexico has maintained a vigorous cultural presence in Poland and Poland in Mexico

Therefore, it can be concluded with certainty that the relations between Mexico and Poland have a momentum that is expected to continue growing. It has the foundation for a fruitful agenda: more actors are expected to join the relationship with a variety of dialogues and exchanges, leading to a strengthening of the fabric of the relationship.

Nevertheless, together with its expansion, intensifying the bilateral trade is a fundamental condition to deepen the relationship. Just as when the signature of the Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and the European Union and the Polish accession to the EU were paradigmatic episodes that helped to develop the commercial exchanges, a new milestone in the relationship is the Modernization of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement. Also, it must be pointed out that continuity is important on the way towards a partnership. The efforts made in recent years by both countries that have given the relation a special momentum, will not be enough if the pace is not kept.

Thus far, the steady strengthening of the relations between Mexico and Poland seems to move, with certainty, in the correct course. This bodes well for the future developments of this partnership in the making.

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