Introduction to the Leadership Forum

Security is one of the most salient issues in Latin America today. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos won re-election in June 2014 in a vote that was essentially a referendum on the peace negotiations that he has established with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC acronym in Spanish) in hopes of ending Colombia's decades-old civil war. Simultaneously, Mexico has witnessed further upheaval as citizens in some areas have taken up arms, and received support from the federal government, in opposition to drug cartels. These are only two examples of high profile developments in Latin America related to security issues.

Of course, the notion of (in)security is not limited to violence. Latin American security debates include elements of human security and environmental security that address poverty, marginalization, lack of access to strategic resources, etc. For example, Latin American leaders, such as Evo Morales (President of Bolivia) promulgated the movement that led to the establishment of the Human Right to Water which was recognized by the United Nations in 2010. It seems that Latin America is the world region where security policies most effectively address the multifaceted and dynamic nature of globalized security threats.

The international conference Human and Environmental Security in Cross-border Regions: Multidisciplinary approaches in Latin America held in the University of Luxembourg in October 2013, was a successful gathering of scholars whose groundbreaking research reflects on most urgent matters of security in Latin America. Organized by the Belgian and Luxembourgish Association of Latin-Americanists (LABEL) and the Consortium for Comparative Research on Regional Integration and Social Cohesion (RISC), the two-day gathering reflected on pertinent issues in human and environmental security, both timely and relevant matters in global geopolitics. Twenty presentations by senior and junior Latin Americanists, such as Marc Brightman and Vanessa Grotti (whose article published in this issue derived from their participation in the conference), were delivered in three world languages: Spanish, French, and English.

The conference, which included six panel sessions, was organized around the themes of human and environmental security, cross-border
politics, regional integration, resource management, vulnerability, and human rights. The original analytical presentations reflected on the critical points through which these complex themes intersect with each other in relation to Latin America’s vulnerable border zones. Some of the more specific concerns addressed by speakers were: migrations, health, food security, poverty and social risks, disasters and social inequities. While each of the panel sessions contributed critical concepts to broader discussions in the field of human and environmental security, the keynote speeches delivered by Alfredo Limas Hernández, professor and artist, and Evangelina Arce, activist and mother of a desaparecida, grounded the conference in a vital way through discussions of femicide, impunity, and insecurity in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Professor Limas Hernández provided an academic analysis of femicide within the context of local, state, and national politics. Ms. Arce shared her experiences and her views as an activist on the current situation in Ciudad Juarez. Both speakers called for active government intervention on the violence against women and institutional support for the campaign to strengthen respect for women’s rights in Juarez, and Mexico in general. Regions & Cohesion is pleased to publish their contributions in this Leadership Forum in recognition of their dedicated commitment to address the issue of femicide in Ciudad Juarez. While the article by Ana Gabriela Sánchez Santana and David Pérez Esparza was not related to the LABEL conference, the editors have decided to include it in this Leadership Forum because the city of Monterrey has also been affected by border security issues as well.

Accompanying the LABEL conference, a photographic exhibit entitled Entrecruces was held in two campuses of the University of Luxembourg. The exhibition collected by Professor Hernández features works by Mexicans artists who have portrayed the violence against women in Ciudad Juarez. Co-organized by “espace cultures,” the cultural arm of the University, Entrecruces politicizes femicide as a result of the violence in the drug trade. Powerful images of Juarez confront those who are open to understanding the continuity between gender violence and political structures. The Luxembourg-based NGO Action Solidarite Tiers Monde (ASTM) also hosted a forum entitled corps de femme - danger de mort where violence in Juarez was the focus. Eva Arce shared her experiences in campaigns and read poetry in these events. Interviews were also conducted with Luxembourgish newspapers and radio. Supported by the University of Luxembourg’s UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies ( UNU-CRIS), the conference and Entrecruces have brought to Europe important discussions on some of the most challenging issues of our time in Latin America.
This conference was organized within the framework of the University of Luxembourg-funded HUMENITY (Human and Environmental Resources in Cross-Border Regions) research project. One of the objectives of this project is to construct a methodology for the understanding of both human and environmental security in cross-border territories and how macro-regional security affects cross-border micro-regions. The conference included a variety of presentations which indicated that border regions can be both the cause of insecurity and potential solutions through cross-border cooperation.

The Editors