

Address by His Excellency Fernando de la Rúa President of the Republic of Argentina

The 1980s were an exceptional period in the history of the countries of Latin America, marked by a return to their democratic institutions. It was a time of change, of transformation and of commitment. It was a decade of institutional renaissance.

Government of the people, by the people, for the people, which was advocated by great Argentine constitutionalists, meant the decisive defeat of despotism. Representative democracy has now taken root in the region and a constant effort is needed by all to ensure it is fully operative.

Democracy is nourished by fundamental values that all our countries share, such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, economic and social progress in a context of freedom, etc. This system of government rejects fanaticism and violence, but it can be harmed by disinterest or failure to become involved. Its strength depends on the enthusiasm with which citizens participate in the possibilities it offers them.

Democracy leaves a stamp on nations, a style that is reflected in their international activities. It brings transparency and behaviour based on consistent rules that are known and respected by all.

On the American continent, where military coups interrupted the democratic system for decades, the re-establishment of democracy has helped to give a decisive impetus to regional integration processes. Mercosur is a clear example. It reflects the abandonment of obsolete theories of conflict and a shift to policies of cooperation among the partners.

Democracy and peace, as the pillars of this process, have translated into the *Ushuaia Protocol on Democratic Commitment* in Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile, which has been incorporated as one of the basic documents into the *Treaty of Asunción*, together with the Political Declaration of Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile as a Peace Zone and the Buenos Aires Charter on Social Commitment in Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile.

The *Ushuaia Protocol*, signed in July 1998, reiterates the content of the 1992 *Presidential Declaration of Las Leñas*, which states that the full effectiveness of democratic institutions is an essential condition for inclusion of the party states and that any rupture of democratic order in one of them is an unacceptable obstacle for that state to continue in the process.

As a result, the Political Consultation and Concertation Forum of Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile has spoken out repeatedly in cases in which democratic institutions have been threatened.

Under the framework of the OAS, we adopted the Santiago Commitment to Democracy and Renewal of the Inter-American System in Chile in 1991, on the occasion of the 21st OAS General Assembly and Resolution 1080 on representative democracy.