



## **IS MEXICO UNDER MR. CALDERON AT THE POINT OF NO RETURN IN ITS CONFLICT WITH ORGANISED CRIME?**

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In September 2006, during the last months of Mr Vicente Fox's term as President of Mexico, a presidential spokesman gave assurances that the government had no intention of sending the Army in to reestablish public order in Tijuana, which had become prey to a wave of criminality unprecedented in its scope. He added that Mexican soldiers should 'never' be engaged in police operations in urban areas.

In January 2007, one month after assuming office, President Felipe Calderon ordered that the 2,300 policemen of Tijuana be confined to barracks and disarmed, and he entrusted control of the city to the Army and the Federal Police.

Since then, the bloodletting has continued in Mexico. After clashes between rival criminal bands and their allies there are always dozens of casualties. The first military victims fell in combat in February. while the cartels have appeared to conduct a veritable counter-offensive against the forces of law and order.

Mr. Calderón's decision to move the Armed Forces to the forefront in the fight against organised crime has not introduced anything fundamentally new in this area. But the reaction of the cartels shows that they decided to act as if the authorities had taken that final step past the point of no return in a war 'genuinely' without mercy.

Will the government maintain its commitments in the face of this bloody build-up?

### **The involvement of the Armed Forces**

- **A decision in keeping with the Constitution and the laws**

According to the Constitution, the Mexican Army participates in safeguarding national security both at the level of domestic security and in the terms of defending the Federation against foreign threats. In this context, the Armed Forces have many missions and commitments relating to domestic security: preservation of the constitutional order and of democratic institutions, integration within the national system of civil defence, involvement in campaigns of a social nature and development and, finally, support for the Ministry of

Internal Affairs in the struggle against terrorism, smuggling and illegal trafficking in people, arms and drugs.

In fact the Mexican Armed Forces<sup>1</sup> are not active in any overseas operations and devote themselves essentially to these missions. They are very regularly in contact with the local population during natural disasters or in initiatives having a social character, and so they enjoy a good image in the country at large, where they act as nearly the sole arm of the central government in dealing with dramatic situations and in showing its care for ordinary Mexicans.

- **An option used by former Presidents and, in particular, by Mr. Fox**

The government of Vicente Fox early on revealed its hopes to reduce crime in all its manifestations and established this as one of its priority areas of activity.

From the very start of his term in office, President Fox won approval of his National Programme for Drug Control, which lasted the full six years of his Administration (2000-2006). During this time, the federal security forces (police and Army) continued, as in the past, to engage in crack-down, taking part in combat that the new head of state wanted to be aggressive and 'head-on'.

In order to fight against crime in general, the government introduced an action programme and a 10 point battle plan, with prevention (social development, education, support for the family) at its core. The implementation was supported by major contributions from the budgets of the various States. A 4,000 man strong Federal Agency of Investigation (AFI) was also created.

After an enormous demonstration in 2004 which brought together hundreds of thousands of persons to express their weariness with crime and their demand for better security, the President committed himself in 2005 to promoting more radical initiatives. On June 11, 2005 'Operation Mexico Seguro' (Operation Safe Mexico) was launched in 3 States of the North that were especially suffering from 'narco-violence': Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Baja California.

The operation was later extended to other States. It saw coordinated action by federal, State and municipal authorities, and it involved resources of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Justice, Finance, Defence (the Army and Air Force) and the Navy. The operation combined attacks on criminal bands, monitoring arterial roads and border areas (with the Army used outside of urban areas), as well as such preventive actions as inspections and individual checks on people in public places, with an appeal made for citizens' participation. The figures on results in terms of arrests are eloquent: 90% of the seizures were done by the Armed Forces, while the police forces were mainly active in the arrest of drug traffickers. But for the average Mexicans, at the end of the day Operation Mexico Seguro was a failure overall.

### **The difficult legacy of 'six lost years'**

Despite the launch of the Mexico Seguro plan mentioned above and other government initiatives such as the creation of a Federal Ministry of Public Security or the unpromising launch of total reform of public security and penal justice, Vicente Fox's term in office looked like 'six lost years' in the area of state security and justice. Nonetheless, it is also true that he

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<sup>1</sup> The Army and Air Force come under the Ministry of National Defence (SEDENA), while the Navy comes under the Ministry of the Navy (SEMAR).

acted no less effectively than his predecessors Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) in trying to halt Mexico's descent towards the status of a major country that is incapable of overcoming problems of domestic security.

#### ▪ **Rising criminality and serious violence**

Available figures indicate steady growth in reported federal offences (trafficking in narcotics, organised crime, fiscal offences ...) during Fox's administration. Though it is true that these statistics show an effort to crack down, their stability over the years and in particular the growth they record<sup>2</sup> show that organised crime has continued to prosper since the start of this century.

The main characteristic of this criminality is seen in the very large number of murders linked to 'narco-violence' (some 3,500 for 2005 and 2006, and more than 2,000 in 2006) perpetrated with growing savagery (beheadings) by groups that appear to be specialised in settling scores and other executions.

The States along the northern border have been the most affected by this criminality, as well as two States (Guerrero and Michoacán) on the Pacific coast<sup>3</sup>. The forces of law and order have paid a heavy price in their clashes with organised crime: more than 60 agents of the AFI have died in the period between the creation of the agency and the end of Mr Fox's term in office.

#### ▪ **Organised crime has put down deep roots in Mexican life**

Mexican organised crime is presently very well developed in three areas of illegal trafficking: people, arms and drugs. The last named constitutes the foundation of all the criminal activities. One may say that it feeds and is fed by the other two types of trafficking.

Obviously Mexico's geographic position largely explains why the country brings together so many 'good reasons' for hosting these activities:

- as a neighbour of the United States, the great 'importer' of drugs and of miserable candidates for the 'American dream' as well as great purveyor of arms, it is also
- the natural northern transit point for a large part of the commercial and migration flows, both normal and illicit, arising in Latin America<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, organised crime finds favourable soil for growth in a society confronting serious problems of development and employment. After years of a high birth rate, the country has on its labour market large numbers of people in age groups which the country's economy today can hardly offer any future prospects.

The GDP per capita of \$6,200 conceals a true structure of Mexican society wherein there is hardly any middle class and 17% of the population still live in extreme poverty despite the social efforts of the Fox government. In this context, a strong phenomenon of domestic migration pushes a flood of miserable unemployed people to the cities and into exile in North America.

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<sup>2</sup> By way of example, from 2002 to 2005, a rise of 64% in the number of crimes linked to drugs and of 1% in the approximately 50,600 other federal crimes reported.

<sup>3</sup> For the year 2006, there are several explicit figures: Sinaloa - 562 executions; Nuevo Leon - 170; Tamaulipas - 17; Guerrero - 355 (including 13 decapitations); Michoacán - 567 (17 decapitations).

<sup>4</sup> Note: 3,500 km of common border with the USA and more than 10,000 km of coastline on the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico.

▪ **A criminal organisation that has grown stronger**

The drug problem has taken root in Mexico ever more deeply and over recent years the country has come to participate in all of its manifestations: transit, culture, fabrication, consumption.

More than ever before in the years following the 1980s Mexico has been the main country of transit towards the United States for South American narcotics: 70% of the cocaine as well as synthetic drugs such as amphetamines. For a long time now the passage across Mexico into North America has been facilitated by the existence of an émigré Mexican community that is estimated to be more than 20 million persons.

Mexico is also a hub for South American drug shipments to Europe and is itself one of the suppliers of drugs, especially via Spain. Mexico has its own cannabis and poppy crops, particularly in the mountainous and very underprivileged regions of the West (Sierra Madre Occidentale), so that the country is today a major producer of heroin for the United States as well as being its largest supplier of marijuana.

Many Mexican labs produce amphetamines, ecstasy and other synthetic drugs for the North American market but also for domestic consumers. In fact, according to recent UN statistics, Mexico is now one of those countries in the world with the most rapid expansion of drug consumption and it ranks above the world average in terms of cocaine consumption. Drug dependency has led to a very noticeable rise in 'ordinary' criminality that is linked to drug consumption, an area in which only the federal police – if they are present – can intervene.

To complete the picture, one has to also consider the money laundering of narcotics revenues (which are estimated by some to be 9% of GDP) in various sectors of economic activity (trade in luxury goods, real estate, the tourism infrastructure).

Mexican narcotics trafficking is a reflection of the traditional organisation of Mexican society and of the lack of effectiveness (and/or of will) of successive governments to attack its bosses. It remains to this day structured in a half-dozen cartels, unlike its Columbian counterpart, which is largely in the hands of the guerillas. Their names reflect geographic areas where they can operate: either along the border with North America, along the Pacific or Atlantic coasts, or in the central region<sup>5</sup>. Nonetheless, the evolution of foreign and local demand (with amphetamines and other synthetic drugs gaining ground on cocaine and heroin), the development of local consumption and the capture of certain leaders account for the shifts in orientation of 'specialties' of some of these cartels. This, of course, gives rise to bloody conflicts of interest and is also, according to the present Prosecutor General Eduardo Medina, the cause of accelerated concentration of these criminal structures. Thus, Mr. Medina says that three of them are their way to dominating nearly all crime based on drugs in Mexico: the cartel of Tijuana (North West region), the cartel of the Gulf (North East region) and the union of the cartels of Sinaloa (Pacific coast) and of Juarez (North region).

Another development which raises the problems posed by Mexican organised crime has been the appearance of groups of men specialising in settling scores and carrying out other executions.

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<sup>5</sup> The main Mexican cartels, the States they are based in and their 'historic' leaders :  
on the border to the North and East to the West : the Gulf (State of Tamaulipas - Osiel Cardenas),  
Juarez (State of Chihuahua - Carrillo Fuentes), Sonora (State of Sonora - Miguel Angel Quintero),  
Tijuana (State of Northern Baja California - Arellano Felix)

- on the Pacific coast : Sinaloa (State of Sinaloa - Joaquin Guzman), Michoacán (State of Michoacán - Luis Valencia)
- in the central region : Colima (States of Colima and Jalisco - Jesus Amezana).

The best known of these are:

- the group of 'Zetas' (the Zs), who work for the Gulf cartel
- the group of 'Pelones' (the 'Tondus' – ones with close-cropped hair) who are in the pay of the Sinaloa cartel

These criminal groups recruit from among Mexico's former 'elite' military and, it would seem, from among foreigners (particularly the ex-Kaibiles, special forces from Guatemala) as well as among the Central American 'maras.' Heavily armed, their anti-personnel and anti-vehicular fire power enables them to crush the local forces of law and order, who are generally ill-equipped. They do not have the scale to mount their own cartels, but appear to be evolving in the direction of independent mafia structures running their own rackets while renting out their specialised services to the 'narcos.'

#### ▪ **A threat to society and to the State**

Without going so far as to suggest that Mexico is today a narco-state, it is clear that its situation begins in many ways to resemble Columbia and its cartels in the 1980s: the importance of drugs revenues in the country's economy, expansion of the mafia system in the functioning of entire parts of society and the way appointed and elected officials – whether of their own free will or under threat of force, 'plata o plomo' (from money or from lead) – come under the influence of the 'narcos.'

The two first levels of public institutions – those of the municipalities and of the States – are now considered to be 'lost,' and this extends even to the level of the governors in the regions where narcotics trafficking provides a lever for further distorting arrangements in a society that has traditionally been inclined towards corruption. The staff of police in the localities and at the State level in these regions may be considered to be integral parties to the criminal sphere.

In parallel with this, journalists<sup>6</sup> who are deemed to be 'troublesome' because of their curiosity or their objectivity are executed without pity.

At the federal level and among the top levels of government, the situation is more complicated, but there are threats and concrete cases of seriously dishonest deals struck with the cartels by high functionaries and military officials or the forces of law and order. Moreover, some Mexican experts believe that following the end of the ascendancy of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in affairs of the Federation, a certain link of subordination of the drug circles to the authorities was broken. The initiatives, even with reduced effectiveness, conducted against the cartels by Presidents Zedillo and Fox thus unleashed a long series of aggressive reactions by criminal organisations, who no longer felt that they had high level cover. In this regard, we recall that Luis Felipe Zavala, first cousin of President Calderon's wife, was murdered last December by assassins less than 15 days after Calderon's accession to power and 2 days after the launch of Operation 'Michoacán' against drug circles was announced...

#### ▪ **A threat which extends beyond the border to the North**

On the US side, concern is growing in the face of a wave of violence. Traffickers who have been taken by surprise do not hesitate to open fire against American law enforcement officials. Initial data indicate an extension of the field of action beyond the border zone for

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<sup>6</sup> According to Reporters Without Borders, 16 journalists were assassinated in Mexico by the narcos between 2000 and 2006. In April, 2 other journalists were, properly speaking, executed.

groups charged with dirty work: executions or kidnappings in Laredo, El Paso and San Diego (in 2004 the DEA believed that the Tijuana cartel was responsible for more than 100 murders in the border area), but also in Dallas (3 executions in 2006). One also notes an increase in the case of dishonest deals between Americans and Mexican drug gangs.

The American authorities have come to fear the spread of the violence, considering the size of the Hispanic community in the States of the Southwest and also the existence of bands of Californian ‘maras.’

## **The initiatives taken during the first six months of Calderón’s presidency**

### **▪ Priorities clearly and promptly announced**

On December 1, 2006, at the age of 44, Mr. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa became the President of the United States of Mexico, taking over from Mr. Vicente Fox. He belongs to the same party as his predecessor, the National Action Party (PAN ; centre and right). As regards public security, candidate Calderón promised to create judicial instances and specialised magistrates dedicated to bringing organised crime to justice. He also proposed to set up a specialised agency for the fight against organised crime.

**Mr Calderón’s first decision, taken on the very day he assumed office, was to name new ministers entering into the national security cabinet: Internal Affairs, Defence, Navy and Public Security.**

In the three months which followed, Mr. Calderón remained true to the policies set out in his campaign and demonstrated that he wanted to reinforce the possibilities for taking action at the federal level. He presented a ‘Federal Pact’ intended to ‘close ranks in the face of organised crime.’ This pact included proposals for reforming the judicial and penal systems to enhance its effectiveness in combating this scourge: the adoption of a single penal code for the entire Federation, the possibility for federal judicial police to carry out wiretapping of telephone conversations and to perform entry and search without a warrant, and transfer to the public domain of property confiscated from criminals in order to modernise the resources available for the national struggle.

In parallel with this, the Minister of Public Security presented plans for restructuring his ministry, in particular, for the creation of a secretariat of state (‘Strategy and Intelligence’) dedicated to the fight against narcotics trafficking and organised crime. He also announced the setting up of a Federal Police Corps (CFP) drawing on the various federal police and designed essentially to give support to the ministry’s anti-drugs division. This creation was preceded at the end of December by the move to place the National Investigation Agency (AFI) and the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) under the authority of a single official.

### **▪ The Armed Forces immediately are on the front line**

No doubt wishing for reasons of domestic policy<sup>7</sup> to unleash as soon as possible an event of national and international importance in an area of such major sensitivity among the population, Mr. Calderón naturally turned to the Armed Forces, the only federal institution that was at the same time immediately available, was respected by all political camps and enjoyed an image in public opinion that was relatively intact.

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<sup>7</sup> We point out that Mr. Calderon was elected with a slight lead of 236,000 votes over his opponent, Manuel Lopez Obrador of the PRD, who did not concede defeat.

Beginning on December 11, 2006, he launched Operation Michoacán in his native state. This operation was designed to confront the narcotics trade and organised crime. The choice of this particular State can easily be explained by some illustrative facts from the year 2006: more than 560 murders, 17 beheadings, 6 police officers assassinated following an attack with anti-tank weapons. The State had served as a battleground for clashes between the cartel of Michoacán and that of the Gulf over 'commercial' competition in synthetic drugs.

This combined operation involved at the outset 7,000 men, of which 5,300 came from various forces and included armoured cars, aircraft, surface vessels and special forces alongside staff from the AFI and the PFP. This made it possible to put a set of control points on the ground and to carry out coordinated actions of search and capture.

Mr Ramírez Acuña, Minister of Internal Affairs, said on the first day of Operation Michoacán that 'the battle against crime has barely begun' and that this 'struggle will take time.' Indeed, similar operations were launched one after another in other States between January and May, 2007.

Thus:

- in January, the effort continued on the Western half, with 'Tijuana' in northern Baja California (3), the 'Conjunta Guerrero' in the Guerrero (10) and 'Sierra Madre' in the adjoining States of Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango (15)
- beginning in February, military resources were directed at the Eastern half in the States of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, near Texas, before intervening
- in March in Tabasco and then in May in Veracruz, two States on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.

**In parallel with this, the President more and more showed his concern and solicitude vis-à-vis the Armed Forces. Beginning in December, M. Calderón regularly praised the devotion of the soldiers in public and sometimes appeared before the troops dressed in a helmet and the jacket of a field uniform.**

For the first time in several years, the draft budget of the Ministries of Defence and Navy showed major, inflation adjusted increases of about 20% in 2007.

Finally, the President was personally committed to raising the pay and benefits of military personnel (particularly of the troops) immediately and putting in place a set of social measures for their benefit..

▪ **Desire for cooperation with the United States reconfirmed**

The end of 2006 saw a cooling in relations between the two countries following President Bush's signing in October of a law authorising construction of an 1,100 km 'wall' along the border intended to slow down clandestine immigration.

Nevertheless, beginning in January Mexico decided to extradite 15 of the main criminals being held in Mexican prisons who were demanded by American courts. Among them were notorious leaders of the Gulf, Sinaloa and Tijuana cartels. This new cooperation gave further evidence of itself in the months that followed, with other extraditions of Mexican citizens to face justice in the United States.

In March, during a meeting in Merida, the two Presidents solemnly declared that their cooperation in the struggle against organised crime was going to be strengthened, particularly at the level of exchange of information. A duly signed agreement stated that this cooperation concerned trafficking in arms, drugs, chemical raw materials and illicit financial activities. This meeting also provided the two Presidents with an opportunity to reaffirm their respective credos with respect to drugs: as a matter to be dealt with at the regional level, from

the perspective of Mr Bush ; and as an instance where no reduction in offer could be envisaged without a reduction in demand, from the perspective of Mr. Calderón.

## **The first results**

### **▪ On the ground, effectiveness to be discussed**

Starting with the launch of Operation Michoacán, the authorities have spelled out the results at many press conferences, all the while announcing that the struggle would be long. The operations have made it possible to seize major caches of arms, drugs and clandestine funds (including \$250 million in a single operation in March), the destruction of plantations and the arrest of many criminals, including members of cartels and groups of 'Zetas.' Nevertheless, despite the temporary effects of 'pacification,' it is clear that the results do not correspond to the efforts invested by the federal forces. No major criminal figure has been captured.

There are many observers who believe that the deployment of the forces has prompted the big criminals to flee ('the cucaracha effect'). It is likely that the failure to carry out the various operations simultaneously has struck seriously at the effectiveness of all the resources that were fielded, which today involves about 30,000 men. Moreover, the systematic distrust – often largely justified – of federal forces vis-à-vis the police forces of the States has finally limited their effectiveness given that they are deprived of information and of all local cooperation.

### **▪ Aggressive build-up of criminality**

Extreme violence has very quickly resumed its surge even in the States where federal operations had been carried out. The criminal bands have continued their bloody fights and score settling and they have redoubled their aggressive attacks on law enforcement officials. Thus, in February Guerrero and the city of Acapulco were the battlefields, where half a dozen executions of policemen and local officials took place. During the same month, two soldiers met the same fate in Sinaloa. At the end of March, it was estimated that more than 60 policemen had been assassinated, sometimes by grenades, since the beginning of the year. At the start of May, the death of 5 soldiers in an ambush set by 'narcos' in Michoacán was a spectacular sign that the organised crime circles had decided to take up the government challenge. A single clash between policemen and criminals left 22 dead in Sonora. At the end of May, the media announced that the number of executions during 2007 had gone past the 1,000 mark. At the start of June, the fear arose that the 'Zetas' would ravage the federal capital..

### **▪ Confronted by the first critical demonstrations...**

In mid-May, the first critics came out against the policy of Mr. Calderón, or, more precisely, against his decision to deploy the Armed Forces. Mr. José Luis Soberanes, President of the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH) was the first to speak out. While recognising that the country was paying for the lax policy of the preceding six years and that the authority of the state was under threat, Mr. Soberanes nonetheless stated that he was against the involvement of the Armed Forces in police missions, saying he believed it was contrary to the Constitution. He cited 52 complaints of attacks on human rights brought against soldiers within the context of Operation Michoacán and he recommended quick reinforcement of the police.

Several days later, Amnesty International took up the cause, followed immediately by the Permanent Commission of Congress (with the exception of PAN deputies), which presented its recommendation to President Calderón in favour of reinforcing the police in order to avoid use of the Armed Forces in the 'civilian tasks' of public security. In order not to be

outdone by its rivals, Mr. Lopez Obrador's PRD declared at the start of June that it came out against any 'militarisation' of the federal capital.

▪ **... Mr. Calderón holds to his course**

At the same time, Mr. Calderón confirmed his confidence in the Armed Forces by deciding to create within the Ministry of Defence a Corps of Federal Support Forces (CFAF), which was estimated to consist of about 3,500 military men taken from the Army and Air Force.

Placed directly under the orders of the President, the CFAF, which will be operational in August, will be ready to intervene to 'confront critical situations involving disturbances or attacks on social peace and public security' while showing 'strict respect for the rights of man.'

On the political level, the President clearly carried off a victory on May 29, when he received a statement of support from the National Conference of Governors (CONAGO), which chose to support his options in the matter of struggle against organised crime, and in particular the involvement of the Armed Forces in this struggle.

At the beginning of June, Mme Espinosa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that there was no new 'Colombia Plan' underway with Washington, while confirming the orientation of the presidential accord reached in March. She explained that an initiative had just been launched towards Central America, including a plan to set up a regional centre for the coordination of the fight against narcotics trafficking and related crimes.

### **The point of no return?**

Mr Calderón's commitment with regard to the problem of organised crime and in particular with regard to the threat that drug cartels would take total and irreversible control of his country in a way brings to mind by its spirit and form that of his Columbian counterpart, Álvaro Uribe. But the situations are really quite different, as we see especially in the following facts:

- the enemy is not cloaked in a pseudo political debate and does not practice revolutionary guerilla tactics but is divided among multiples organisations and is at the same time omnipresent
- there are multiple close links with the United States that result from their geographic proximity.

For Mexico, the stakes are immense both in terms of stability and governance and on the regional level in economic terms and implications for leadership in Latin America.

For the moment, the 'risks' cited by various segments of public opinion that Mexico is headed for 'militarisation,' that the rights of man are being scorned by army rabble and that the integrity of military officers is being undermined by contact with the drug circles do not seem serious compared to the gravity of the situation and Mexico's realities today.

Over the several years since the start of the new, 21st century, Mexico has seen considerable progress as regards the exercise of democracy and clarity in the functioning of its institutions. The Mexican Armed Forces do not constitute a Praetorian Guard and their steady involvement amidst the population in dramatic circumstances guaranties real quality for their links with average Mexicans. While abuses have been committed during the start of military operations, it is reasonable to be optimistic with respect to the capability and desire of the high command to take things seriously in hand and to easily win in any comparison with the bands of killers in the matter of respect for the rights of man.

Finally, the risk that the Armed Forces will be 'contaminated' by drug circles is not something new given their previous involvement in the fight against narcotics trafficking and their

permanent presence across all of the national territory. Moreover, the type of aggressive operations going on today does not appear to favour making arrangements with the traffickers.

Without ignoring the threats now directed personally against himself and members of his family, the most serious risks facing Mr. Calderón's undertaking are obviously on the political level. For the moment, the 'narcos' appear to have chosen to reply on the field of 'armed struggle.' This battle of attrition is dangerous for the powers that be not so much in terms of the loss of life it continues to bring but because it will soon offer the Opposition (particularly on the Left) an opportunity to criticize the lack of effectiveness of a President for whom only one Mexican out of two voted and to torpedo the holy aura that surrounds him today. In this regard, the recommendation issued by Congress in May is a herald of things to come.

Later on one may fear there will be more sophisticated initiatives coming from the drug milieu, which will no doubt use their enormous financial resources and take advantage of past and present backroom deals with Mexico's political and business leaders. In this regard, Mr. Calderón should remember the murder of high officials in the 1990s such as Cardinal Posadas Ocampo (1993), presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio (1994) or the ex-Governor of Guerrero, José Ruiz Massieu (1994). Moreover, Mr. Calderón should worry about such difficulties as Mr Uribe is experiencing now when there are revelations of serious compromising deals between political officials on his side and paramilitary Columbian criminals who are facing justice.

It is now too early to state with assurance that Mexico has finally been given a President who is ready to go all the way – at least within his term in office – in implementing a policy of open struggle against organised crime. If we suppose that his will does not weaken, the time at his disposal seems rather short to allow him to eradicate the evil that is deeply rooted in the social, economic and even political fabric of his country. For this last reason, close cooperation with the United States and with the neighbouring countries of Central America is necessary, although it does not really assure the success of an undertaking that is domestic above all.

Whatever the level of success of President Calderón's approach, we have to recognise the courage of an commitment which, for the first time, appears to be sincere and dedicated. We hope that under the impetus he is providing Mexico has finally faced up to organised crime and crossed the point of no return.