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**INTERNATIONAL  
ACADEMIC CONFERENCE REPORT:  
CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICA.  
POLITICS – SOCIETY – ECONOMY  
(TORUŃ, APRIL 18–19, 2011)**

*by Anna Ratke*

On April 18–19, 2011 the University Library in Toruń hosted an international academic conference entitled *Contemporary Latin America. Politics – Society – Economy (Współczesna Ameryka Łacińska. Polityka – społeczeństwo – gospodarka)*. The conference was organised by the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Studies of the Nicolas Copernicus University under the honorary patronage of the Marshal of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship Piotr Całbecki, the President of Toruń Michał Zaleski, the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Peru in Toruń Stanisław Rakowicz, Ph. D. and the Rector of the NCU Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński, Ph. D. The participants represented higher education facilities from all over Poland as well as the international organisation, Community of Democracies.

The goal of the conference was to inspire a debate and reflection on the political and socioeconomic situation of Latin American states following the end of the Cold War. Elaborating on the issues that Latin America states have had to face at the turn of the century, especially related to democratisation, security as well as the position and role of the region within the context of international relations, was considered of paramount importance. The scope of the conference suggested by the hosts also

covered other aspects of the functioning of Latin American states and societies, such as: systems of governance, leadership models, the impact of regionalisation and globalisation processes, solving problems relating to the international economy crisis and war on terrorism, social divisions and social problems, ethnic issues, nationalism, Polish diaspora issues, political culture, main socioeconomic problems, transformation of the economies of Latin American states, as well as implemented models of economy policies.

Due to the broad range of topics discussed as well as a large number of papers submitted (as much as 33 papers had been scheduled), the conference was divided into 4 discussion panels. Day one of the event comprised of the opening panel and the social issues panel. Discussing economic and political issues had been scheduled for the next day.

Guests were welcomed by the conference scientific chairperson Jacek Knopek, Ph.D., Professor of NCU. Vice-Rector for Student Affairs, Professor Witold Wojdyło, Ph.D. and Dean of the NCU Faculty of Political Sciences and International Studies, Professor Roman Bäcker, Ph.D. expressed hope that the conference would inspire further research on the situation of Latin American states in the contemporary world. The Honorary Consul of the Republic of Peru in Toruń Stanisław Rakowicz, Ph.D. presented the audience with an initiative of reflecting on the impact of Polish citizens on the development of the civilisation of Peru.

The first speaker of the opening panel was Jacek Knopek, Ph.D., Professor of NCU, who gave an account of the current state of research concerning the relations between Poland and Latin American states and prospects for development. Maciej Szczurowski, Ph.D, Professor of UG, spoke next and delivered a paper entitled *The World Seen in Caracas in the epistolography of Lech W. Adamowicz (Świat widziany z Caracas w epistolografii Lecha W. Adamowicza)*. The opening panel was concluded by Elżbieta Czarny, Ph.D., Professor of the Vistula University in Warsaw, who spoke on the process of regionalisation of economy in Latin America.

The social panel consisted of 12 papers. It was opened by Jerzy Achmatowicz, Ph.D., from the University of Wrocław, who gave an account of the history of the Polish diaspora in Chile from 1945-1950. The next speaker, Fernando Villagómez Porrás, Ph.D., from the University of Warsaw intro-

duced the audience to the situation of Mexican immigrants in the United States of America. The presentation was followed by Zuzanna Jakubowska, Ph.D. (UW), who delivered a paper entitled *Easter Island. The existence of the Polynesian ethnos within the Chilean state* (*Wyspa Wielkanocna. Egzystencja etni polinezyjskiej w ramach państwa chilijskiego*). Anna Bartnik, Ph.D., from the Jagiellonian University focused on the issues of colour and race in Latin America societies. Aleksandra Wierchucka, Ph.D. (UG) in turn elaborated on the impact of the native foundation Land Without Suffering on the future of Quechua Indians. Paulina Cichomska-Szpakowska, MA, from the University of Łódź, discussed women rights in select Latin American states within the context of international obligations as well as internal regulations. The next speaker, Renata Siuda-Ambroziak, MA (UW), presented a paper, *Contemporary changes in the religious landscape of Brazil: the case of IURD (Igreja Universal de Reino de Deus) in light of Stark and Bainbridge's theory of religion* (*Współczesne zmiany w panoramie religijnej Brazylii: casus IURD (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) w świetle „teorii religii” Starka i Bainbridge’a*), which related to religion issues. The presentation was followed by Małgorzata Sokołowska-Krysiewicz, MA, from the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń, who delivered a paper entitled *Between Négritude, Marxism, Creolisation: From assimilation to independence. Transformations of or variations on the same idea? (Między négritude, marksizmem, kreolizacją – od asymilacji do niepodległości – transformacje czy wariacje jednej idei?)*. The next speaker, Mateusz Proch, MA (NCU), delivered a paper entitled *Brasília. A modernist project and rampant life* (*Brasília. Modernistyczny projekt i pleniące się życie*). Karol Leszczyński, MA (UW), focused on Polish scouting organisations in Latin America. The next speaker, Agnieszka Jaroszewicz, MA (NCU), delivered a paper on daily life in the slums of Peru. Panel one was concluded by Patryk Wawrzyński from the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń, who discussed intercultural communication dilemmas in Latin America.

Day one of the conference was crowned by a Latin American evening meeting, which presented an opportunity for the participants to socialize and discuss in an informal manner the development of research on politics, economy and societies of Latin America.

Day two began with the economy panel, during which five out of eight scheduled papers were delivered. The first speaker was Bartosz Michalski, Ph.D., from the University of Wrocław, who delivered a comparative analysis of Brazilian and Mexican economies with regard to competition in the international market. It was followed by Renata Rettinger, Ph.D., from the Pedagogical University of Cracow, who used the example of the Dominican Republic to discuss the issue of competitiveness of tourist regions. The next speaker, Rafał Willa, Ph.D., from the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń, outlined economic relations between the European Union and Latin America. Mirosław Wójtowicz, Ph.D. (Pedagogical University in Cracow), delivered a paper on development and transformation of the automotive industry in Brazil and Mexico at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. Panel two was concluded by the paper delivered by Jerzy Achmatowicz, Ph.D. (University of Wrocław), *Chilean open-ended pension funds: Sources of success and their contemporary role in the economy of Chile (Chilijskie OFE – źródła sukcesu oraz ich aktualna rola w gospodarce chilijskiej)*.

The final panel of the conference concerned political issues and comprised of eight papers. Radosław Sajna, Ph.D., from Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, elaborated on the directions of development and contemporary media propaganda in Columbia and Venezuela. Next, Karol Derwich, Ph.D., from the Jagiellonian University, discussed the problem of bankrupt states in the Latin America region. Paweł Malendowicz, Ph.D., representing the Stanisław Staszic Higher Vocational State School in Piła, delivered a paper entitled *Zapatistas in Mexico in the light of globalisation processes of the contemporary world (Zapatyści w Meksyku na tle procesów globalizacyjnych współczesnego świata)*. Kamil Miliszewski, MA, from the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń, presented the audience with the issue of anti-globalisation in Latin America. Kinga Brudzińska, MA, who represented the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies, discussed the problem of democracy and authoritarian regimes in Latin American states. Karolina Powęzka, BA, from the Jagiellonian University, delivered a paper entitled *Media and the experiences of democracy in Peru (Media a doświadczenia demokracji w Peru)*. Anna Ratke, MA (NCU), elaborated on political relations between Venezuela and Spain in the times

of Hugo Chavez's presidency. The last speaker, Michał Drgas MA, from the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń, delivered a paper on the role of state identity in the processes of shaping international security structures in post-Cold War Latin America.

The delivered papers motivated the participants to discuss a number of issues of paramount importance. The conference was concluded by Jacek Knopek, Ph.D, Professor of NCU, who thanked the speakers for their contribution and reminded that the papers presented would be collected and published.

The conference proved that Latin America is a dynamic region and a field of continuous changes and processes. Therefore, it is worth continuing the research in order to broaden knowledge of the region.