

The democratization of international organizations



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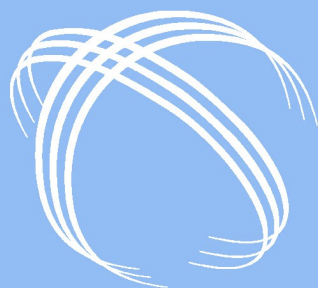
CENTRE FOR STUDIES ON FEDERALISM

First International Democracy Report 2011



**Parliamentary
Confederation of
the Americas**

by
Laura Roscio



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During the Summit of the Americas held in Miami in 1994, the heads of State and Government of these countries - Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, United States, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela - decided to revive the intra-continental relationships through the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. This ambitious project of economic integration - to extend from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego - was soon supported by a political cooperation process led by parliaments. At the initiative of the National Assembly of Quebec in September 1997, in this Canadian province, a conference was held where about 400 parliamentarians participated with the purpose of laying the foundations for an independent and permanent dialogue¹. The proposal was moved forward, leading in July 2000 in Puerto Rico, to the official establishment of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA). Since its inception the organization has brought together representatives of federal and federated countries' assemblies, regional parliaments and international parliamentary forums with the aim of promoting the growth of an American community based on solidarity, rule of law and democracy.

At the institutional level, COPA is based on a General Assembly which meets annually² to discuss action strategies relating the organization's spheres of interest and issues on consensus basis recommendations to governments. The Executive Committee³ responsible for the federal government administration, is a body composed by the parliamentary representatives of the American sub-regions, with the task of setting meetings and the working agenda of the General Assembly and

¹ The Conference's theme was "The America of 2005: Democracy, Development and Prosperity." At the end of the summit it was decided to set up a steering committee with the task of defining the terms for a creation of a permanent dialogue forum.

² The General Assembly meets at the invitation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Americas.

³ The Executive Committee, which replaced the original steering committee promoted during the Conference of Québec, exerts its powers on a consensual basis.

implementing its decisions. The organization's activity is developed concretely by permanent thematic working commissions⁴. Within these commissions the parliamentarians have the opportunity to exchange information and adopt common positions through reports to be submitted to the Assembly. COPA Committees covers various sectors:

- Democracy and peace,
- Economy, trade, work, competitiveness and trade blocs,
- Education, culture, science and technology,
- Health and social protection,
- Environment and sustainable development,
- Human rights, indigenous peoples and citizen security.

A Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas was also created in order to enhance within the national and regional legislations political attention on issues such as respect for gender equality and the active participation of women in socio-political processes⁵. Lastly, the inter-parliamentary organization was provided with three Secretariats referring to the Mexico congress, the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil, the National Assembly of Quebec. These are responsible for maintaining and deepening relations with all the popular assemblies in each sub-area of the continent⁶.

From Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2001)⁷ to Caracas, Venezuela (2003), from Quito, Ecuador (2006) to Salta, Argentina (2009), the Confederation during its summits has gradually been committed to supporting the active presence of parliaments and increasing their synergy with executive powers when it comes to continental economic integration processes. The initiative concerning the creation of a free trade area has undoubtedly influenced COPA's action strategy: the problems of the project in terms of social consequences have led the organization to enforce its parliamentary influence over negotiations in order to ensure the process of transparency and legitimacy⁸.

⁴ Each Commission has an office consisting of a president, a vice-chairman and rapporteurs.

⁵ The Network established in 1999 generally meets concurrently with meetings of the General Assembly.

⁶ The Secretariat of Mexico is the Executive Secretariat of the Organization as a whole.

⁷ During the General Assembly in Rio new statutes were approved which provided a legal identity and a financing plan to the Confederation.

⁸ During the Summit in Caracas, in particular, the participating parliamentarians adopted a recommendation in which they expressed their willingness to be involved in the negotiation process for a free trade area, participating in the Tripartite Commission formed by the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Supporting economic development as well as strengthening democracy and human rights has been strategic goals of COPA. The latter has carried out several election observation missions and good offices missions in problematic countries and regions, aiming to prevent conflicts and promote non-violent resolutions of crisis⁹. The challenges of growing global and continental interdependence have also resulted in COPA strengthening dialogue with the regional legislative assemblies and carrying out, particularly with the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA), a joint working group (2003) laying the groundwork for a possible integration between these two organizations. The fight against poverty, the defence of natural resources for a sustainable development, the protection of cultural and linguistic diversity and the promotion of female solidarity and social justice were the debating topics upon which the confederation has developed its own political action. Although it is an assembly that has established a structured relationship with a specific government organization, COPA was capable of gaining influence, making the inter-parliamentary dialogue an essential tool for the growth of democratic cooperation in the Americas.

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⁹ Election observation missions were carried out in Bolivia, Mexico, El Salvador (2009), Paraguay (2008), Argentina, Guatemala, (2007), Nicaragua and Brazil (2006), while in Haiti (2004) a mission of good offices was accomplished.



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