

Foreign Policy of Chile: Principles and challenges on the current global and regional stages

Speech by H.E. Roberto Ampuero, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile

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AS DELIVERED

Dear Cynthia, thank you very much for this invitation. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by expressing my joy at being in Washington, D.C., capital of this great country that has been my home for eighteen years, where I developed a good part of my professional career as a professor and writer, and where I arrived with my family as an immigrant for my graduate studies.

This country opened its doors to me, just as it has to millions of other people who, at some point, embraced its coasts in pursuit of opportunities, democracy, tolerance, and freedom.

It is a great honor to be at the Wilson Center, which this year celebrates a half-century as a living testimony of former President Woodrow Wilson, Nobel Peace Prize winner and inspiration for the League of Nations.

At this presentation, I would like to express some reflections on democracy, freedom, liberty, human rights, and free trade, as well as Chilean foreign policy for the next four years of the second administration of President Sebastián Piñera.

Perhaps one of the main characteristics of the Chilean foreign policy is that it's conceived as a, [what] we call, "state policy" (*política de Estado*) based on a broad consensus about what national interest means for us. The pillar of continuity is rooted in our diplomatic tradition and institutional order.

Upon the inauguration of each new government in Chile, it is understood that nobody is seeking to design an absolutely new foreign policy structure, but rather to add a new floor to this building.

They are the great backdrop on which our endeavors unfold, which allow us to work towards medium and long-term goals and respond to challenges in matters of peace and international security, strengthen neighborly relations, as well as deliver the best conditions possible to develop and promote democratic values and developments.

The cornerstone of our foreign policy is full respect for international law, which includes defending the validity of treaties, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for national sovereignty.

Chile is a reliable partner, primarily because it honors its pledges permanently and only hopes for the same from our counterparts.

I assure you without hesitation that the large majority of Chilean diplomats who have passed through this forum have begun their speeches highlighting these same fundamentals: *probably continuity might be boring, but it gives us consistency.*

The second principle is the promotion of peace, democracy, and respect for human rights.

Due to our experience between 1970 and 1990, to which I could add my own personal history living under left-wing and right-wing dictatorships, in Chile we have an absolute commitment to democracy and democratic values. I would say that we as society have learned the lesson, and the dangers of polarization, intolerance, and no civic dialogue.

There are no good dictatorships. I want to stress that. Democracy can't be compared in terms of results with authoritarian regimes. With regards to political participation, progress and degrees of freedom, democracy has clearly demonstrated both superiority and flexibility, and also an ability to deal with social demands.

On this point, allow me to make a brief reflection on the threat of populism. In my opinion the most dangerous threat to democracy in our region, populism with a democratic face but authoritarian in its essence, or as Mario Vargas Llosa says, "*a disease against which no democracy is vaccinated, that wears the mask of the right and left, sacrificing the future for a transitory present*".

It is interesting to note that populists never refer to themselves as such. In democracy, populists are truly free riders; they hoist attractive proposals for an indeterminate mass, describe complex problems in a simple manner, and claim to have magical solutions.

For those who believe in liberal democracy and freedom, the best available instrument to combat populism is the design of public policies and being able to defeat, also, the populists in the area of the political ideas.

Public policies, as tools, aimed to increase the well-being of the greatest number of people. However, we know that our responses are temporary, and at some point will require adjustments.

To quote Karl Popper, here there is also a “*search without end*” because not only do we not have all the answers, but also because the ones we do have are temporary and need constant revision.

We enforce these two principles: defense of democracy and freedom and promotion of human rights including with regards to brother countries in the region whose democracies are at risk and that find themselves on the brink of a humanitarian crisis.

In that sense, we will not hesitate to state that the Venezuela crisis must be resolved democratically and peacefully and the solution must come from the Venezuelans themselves, with the international community sharing the responsibility to cooperate in their solution.

The Venezuelan regime should listen to the Venezuelan people and the international community. Their government is responsible for the tragedy they are facing these days, a tragedy with a serious hemispheric impact.

For that reason, next Monday, the Lima Group will meet in Mexico City, where Chile will be present alongside several partner countries from the region, urging the Venezuelan government to listen to its people and offer democratic, free, and fair elections.

We Chileans do not forget that Venezuela was the home of thousands of our citizens following the coup d'état in 1973 and for that reason today we are home to more than 170.000 Venezuelans who have arrived in recent years in Chile.

I believe that the primary lesson is that the liberal, or the Western, democracy must [be] duly cared for. Failing that, just as with many things in life, we will appreciate its true importance the moment we lose it.

Just as the British historian Ferguson reminds us, *“So much of liberalism in its classical sense is taken for granted in the West today, and even disrespected. We take freedom for granted, and because of this, we don't understand how incredibly vulnerable it is”*.

The third principle of our foreign policy is the willingness to cooperate with other nations. We also say that it is a duty, not just our will. And this holds true for a variety of reasons. Firstly, because Chile was a recipient of cooperation funds that financed important programs for our path towards development.

In this context, I would like to report that the OECD decided a few months ago to graduate Chile and remove it from the Official Development Assistance Eligibility List, due to the income level we have achieved, which will evidently require us to redefine our cooperation policy.

To these three great guidelines we have added our firm conviction to bring closer the common citizen to diplomacy and foreign policy issues.

Perhaps, much more than in the United States, in our region citizens feel that diplomacy is a subject more linked to cocktail receptions than to real life and everyday people's problems.

This is due to the fact that Latin America is probably the region where more treaties and agreements about integration have been signed, that have filled thousands of pages that surely remain on the shelves of foreign ministries, but that have generated few advances in concrete terms.

The ideological chasm in Latin America has become an important hurdle that in some cases has not only hampered the integration process, but paralyzed it as it is the case of UNASUR.

For this reason half of its twelve members, including Chile, decided to halt their participation and suspended their financial contributions, because UNASUR was simply not delivering in any substantive way its duties. In the case of Chile, we took such a decision based on our search for a responsible management of both public resources and our support for an efficient multilateralism.

We will continue advancing our goals for a better quality integration, in fine coordination with other countries of the region. Mainly, because we forge our foreign policy from our Latin American cultural identity and this is how Chile presents itself to the international community.

In this regard, I can tell you that a few days ago, President Piñera concluded his first official visit to Argentina and Brazil, two countries with which we share an auspicious, and sometimes, conflictive moment, marked by profound coincidences regarding global and regional themes.

President Piñera also visited Peru on the occasion of the Summit of the Americas, and he had his first meeting with the recently inaugurated President Martín Vizcarra. After the International Court of Justice decision on the maritime border in 2014, with Peru we have inaugurated a new era in bilateral relations characterized by a vision of future.

Regarding our neighbor, Bolivia, I just want to highlight, beyond the decision of the International Court of the Hague, that we believe the Court will recognize the solid arguments put forth by our country. We hope to continue advancing in the necessary integration, that must be carried out openly, but also fulfilling the commitments both countries agreed, in particular the Treaty of 1904, the cornerstone of the bilateral relation with Bolivia that brings stability, security, and peace to both countries.

The dynamic and evolving international scenario claims for a foreign policy to be designed and implemented on both continuity and change. That is why we are introducing some

adjustments to our foreign policy, continuity and change, to better align our principles with the outcomes we would like to achieve.

Allow me to mention only some of them. Firstly, we are devising a foreign policy that is somehow decoupled from political contingency. A foreign policy with a more visible prospective, aimed at anticipating risks while seizing opportunities.

From this perspective, we have decided to center our efforts on achieving a more long-term view in issues that generally don't form part of the day-to-day work in foreign ministries, but towards where we want to concentrate with a vision of full coordination with the private sector, academia, and civil society as a whole.

In this context, let me give you one example of this approach. Chile's border runs more than 2.600 miles throughout continental Chile, similar to the distance between New York and San Francisco, and makes the country a gigantic deposit of abundant reserves of fresh water, forests, mineral resources, climate systems, and ecological relations that include vast southern maritime spaces and millions of square miles of Antarctic territory.

In this geographic inventory, despite of the long distance from the global centers of power, Chile becomes a strategic actor beyond its borders.

On this dynamic and uncertain global stage, the future of free trade is by far one of the most relevant topics. From a philosophical and political perspective, if you will, rather than merely an economic one, the free trade of goods, services, and investments, expanded and gained legitimacy in tandem with democratic ideas.

This evolving process show[s] us that truly free societies evolve towards freedom from an integrated approach, in equilibrium, bringing together political, economic, [and] social freedoms.

Having said that, today free trade is facing challenges and critiques that we must deal with. The main criticism comes from countries that championed free trade, and it is based on that the benefits of open markets have primarily favored the elite.

These negative trade complaints, whose escalation may lead to a trade war is a concern for us, as a country. As Jane Harman, CEO of this Center, has recently asserted: “*Trade war is totally unnecessary*”. It brings a big deal of uncertainty to the global markets, with consequences that rapidly streamlined in both governments and market operators.

We have also recently learned about a letter signed by more than 1.100 economists, warning the U.S. government about its “rise-the-tariff” approach to trade. It is interesting to note that many of the passages of this letter are quoted from another letter sent in 1930, preventing against protectionist measures the U.S. imposed at the start of the Great Depression.

This shift may generate political dividends in the short term, but in the long term does not contribute to the generation of wealth, affects the efficiency in the distribution of resources, hurts the job market, and generates pernicious incentives that in the long run do not contribute to the overcoming of poverty.

Currently, Chile is one of the most open economies in the world; it has 26 trade agreements with 64 economies, which represent 63% of the world population and are responsible for 86% of world GDP. This policy has guaranteed greater certainty for trade and the flow of investment, boosting commercial exchange. With our main trade partners, China and the United States, our exports have multiplied in the last twelve years. I would like to stress that during this decade China became our first commercial partner, USA now is the second after decades of a clear predominance.

In trade issues, we will certainly continue strengthening the successful integration mechanism of the Pacific Alliance, that now has more than sixty observers and will soon include four new powerful associated states: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Singapore. In this area, we will continue the deepening of convergences of the Alliance with Mercosur to advance in real Latin American integration, not the rhetorical one.

The recent signing ceremony held in Chile of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, an ambitious and high standard agreement,

alongside other ten partners, signals our decisive commitment to trade liberalization, regional integration, inclusive growth, and job creation.

We strongly believe that the CPTPP and the Pacific Alliance are key pathways to the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific and during our APEC host year in 2019, we will emphasize the work with that goal in mind. However, these efforts are not enough. We need collective and multilateral approaches.

And allow me, ladies and gentlemen, just to finish, I would like to share some brief words about bilateral relations between Chile and the United States. Our countries maintain a historical relationship based on a long-standing friendship.

Traditionally we have shared visions about democracy, freedom, human rights, globalization, openness to business, characterized most often by a deep closeness and less commonly by distance and mistrust as a result of the collateral effects of the Cold War.

Our commercial linkages have been historically intense. For Chile, the U.S. was traditionally its primary trade partner. I would like also to agree that the United States, although China is the most, our most important partner, the United States is the most important investor in Chile, with a very deep portfolio of nearly \$30 billion dollars. We are convinced of the necessity to approve the bilateral agreement to avoid double taxation.

It is our firm intention [not only] to continue strengthening what we already have, but also to expand the relations towards new cooperation mechanisms in education, scientific research, science, innovation, and energy cooperation.

In this context, for us, it is highly relevant to expand the already-successful existing experiences with Chile-California and Chile-Massachusetts to other states and regions in this enormous country. We value Chile's successful participation in the Visa Waiver Program as a milestone in our bilateral relations and because of that, we are committed to continue implementing further agreements, as we have done recently.

In sum, continuity and changes mark the spirit of our approach to Chile's foreign policy.

We are aware that international relations is an environment where, if you want to go fast, you can go alone; but if you want to go far, then you have to come together with partners and allies, based on affinities and conveniences.

For Chile, a far-away country but one open to the world, it is fundamental to maintain a vision founded on the principle of cooperation between nations.

As the illustrious President Wilson said, "*We are citizens of the world. The tragedy of our times is that we do not know this.*"

Thank you very much.

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