First, I want to stress how honored I am to be able to participate in this important meeting. Frankly, I feel a little bit nervous sitting here in front of such a distinguished and influential audience.

In my commentary I would like to develop three main points. But before that, let me say something about the perspective of my commentary. I am sure you all are familiar with the section entitled “Think Again” of *Foreign Policy* in which issues taken for granted are reconsidered from “a novel perspective.”

In this occasion, my purpose by adopting the “think again” perspective is not so much to challenge Dr. Massey’s points, as to look at some of the points he made but from a different perspective — a Mexican one — since Dr. Massey’s presentation was basically from a U.S. perspective — i.e., what the U.S. might do, whereas we in Mexico have also certain things to do.

In my opinion, Dr. Massey simplified somewhat the argument, regarding the European Union example and how Spain was transformed by it, when he stated that funds from the European Union played an important role in the transformation of Spain and Spanish migration patterns. I have a slightly different reading of what happened in Europe and of the transformation of Spain from an emigration to an immigration country. This transformation took place during the ‘70s and ‘80s, well before Spain really began to receive huge amount of funds from the European Union. On this point, the “think again” approach means that in these processes of transition and transformation, domestic changes were also quite important and Spain prepared itself well in advance to the accession to the now European Union, a move that facilitated the taking advantage of the opportunities that would come from the country’s accession to the European Union.

Another point, in his presentation Dr. Massey did not mention something he points out in his paper, namely, the fact that disparities among North American countries are not as marked as those in Europe, referring to some East-European countries rather than to Portugal or Spain. On this point, following my “think again” approach, I believe that there are really more fundamental contrasts within the North American region in comparison to the European Union. My point basically is that in Europe, even before the project of the European Union started, there was a sort of process of convergence. Essentially, most of the countries in Europe — if not all of them, from France to Spain, Portugal and the Eastern European countries — had some kind of a welfare state. Thus, in more than one way there were implicit processes of convergence in terms of levels of education, health, and in many other dimensions, a fact that made it possible for those populations that were going to precede the European Union to take advantage of the opportunities ahead.

This observation does not mean that there are no possibilities of economic and social convergence in North America. My point here is that we in Mexico will have to make much greater efforts domestically in order to put the country more directly into the convergence path. Moreover, let us recall that the “European vision” concerning the regional unification project had explicit convergence objectives — which is not the case in North America. In this regard, it is also very important to recall the fact that regional domestic
disparities in Mexico are greater than the ones among most European countries. Thus, the challenges for convergence in North America are far greater. In my view, Mexico continues to be a very dual society and dual economy, where a large part of the population has rather elementary skills, although fundamental and important ones, and where a considerable proportion of the working population hardly knows how to read and write properly. For those segments of the population, taking advantage of regional integration processes — within Mexico and within North America — is going to be a rather difficult task.

The final point I want to make is that the North America bloc is basically a commercial one, a reality that represents a quite important difference from the European bloc. This peculiarity, in my view, has become clearer or more visible after September 11, an event (with its repercussions) that has raised big challenges for Mexico.

Massey states in his presentation — and he is absolutely right on calling our attention to this development — that the current situation regarding Mexico-U.S. migration, when there is very low or almost none net undocumented migration, offers the U.S. a respite to rethink its border policies, which may shift — and I think this is the main line of his argument — towards a more European-style approach. On this point, my “think again” perspective suggests that this idea of “a migratory respite” translates into new challenges for Mexico. Why? Because the current situation might end up challenging some of the basic Mexican attitudes vis-à-vis migration which the country might have to rethink. Indeed, Mexico has to start considering the development of a new migration agenda. What do I mean by that? It is my position that for years Mexico has somehow relied on the assumption that, since over the years there has been a strong demand for Mexican labor, one way or the other this demand has to be satisfied by Mexican labor supplies, and that there will always be “ways” to do so.

I am sure many of you recall those cartoons, particularly Mexican ones, when walls started to be built along the U.S. side of the border, whose “message” was that no matter how high the walls, Mexicans would always be clever enough to jump over them. In other words, that message was quite at odds with another message that also needed to be instilled in our population, that migration has to be orderly and that there are rules for it. So as a country we were also — as the United States had been for long periods — quite permissive vis-à-vis undocumented migration to the United States.

What I call a new migration agenda for Mexico is based on three basic or main pillars. One pillar would have to do with developing efforts to retain the population in the country. While Mexico has traditionally been a country of emigration — the country has taken the possibility of emigration for granted — it has now to start thinking how to stop being a country of emigration. Let me explain briefly what I mean by this. I think the country has to find ways to factor in migration within the general economic and social policies of the country, with the aim of discouraging migration. Of course, I do not have any recipe for that, but I think we have to change the previous approach, when we were relying on an indefinite continuity of the emigration phenomenon.

The second pillar is like the other side of the former. At the same time that Mexico attempts to retain its population, it has to make additional efforts to support its would-be emigrants (and of a different nature from the current efforts, which are fine) in order to make their migration experience a successful one. On this respect the country has to look for any opportunity to exploit all U.S. and Canadian legal avenues to place its migrant workers abroad. I think Mexico is not doing enough on that front. We have to start thinking in terms of organizing migrants in one way or the other; and in this concept of organizing migrants I include also the idea of putting order in the process, i.e., making the process a safe and legal one. In the Philippine case, there are good practices in this respect. We must examine them, and learn from them, to move toward the creation of enterprises of labor with the aim of placing labor in the U.S. in a more entrepreneurial way. I believe this
attitude has been missing in our view.

The first pillar has to do with emigration as a phenomenon, as a process; the second has to do with the migrants as one of the main actors of that process. The third pillar refers to the migration issue as an important item of Mexico’s foreign policy agenda. The country has a long tradition of active involvement on this front, and rather successfully at that. However, I consider that this pillar needed to be mentioned specifically because of the advisability of being reviewed periodically, and probably strengthened, given the changing circumstances regarding Mexican migration in the United States, where “resides” around 10% of the Mexican population (more than 11 million Mexican citizens) and where the Mexican-American community constitutes the largest “national minority.” Concerning this third pillar, the country has already done a lot, pursuing different strategies at times loudly, at times quietly. Given the current conditions, perhaps quite, under the curtains strategies might be more effective or the only feasible ones. Whatever the strategies, the country we must have a very consistent policy to build within North America an area of mobility with certain basic rules.

Inescapably, Mexico has to deal with the U.S. on finding solutions for the migration issue. Acceptable options aren’t that many, and the aim would be to strive for a durable one. I think that North America — conceptualized as a geographically narrow space or as a more extended one, eventually reaching into The Americas — has to move, perhaps slowly but surely and consistently, toward some sort of “regional migration regime,” starting perhaps bilaterally. By “migration regime” I do not mean necessarily free movement of people, but rather a set of rules of mobility within certain areas (most certainly different but yet similar to the European Union model). And by underlying “regional” I want to call attention to a relatively new reality, that nowadays Mexican migration flows have become but one component — certainly the most sizeable and important one — of regional migration flows that include those from most of the Central American countries (particularly of the CA-4 group).

I want just conclude by saying that, from a “think again” perspective, Dr. Massey's paper is indeed an important “think again” contribution in the sense that, while Mexico certainly needed to open its economy — there is no question about it in my mind — the NAFTA-led strategy was a savvy one, but to expect that a freer trade of goods would have been a sufficient strategy to deal with the migration issue was a delusion. Thank you.

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