

**LAVDATIO**  
**DOMINI RICARDO LAGOS ESCOBAR**  
**PRAESIDIS CHILENSIS REIPUBLICAE**

**W**e have today a distinguished guest, one of those personalities whose stature rose to an international significance. Dr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar is in the same time a distinguished professor of economy, a prominent political figure and a former academic administrator. He is the president of the Republic of Chile, after having been for long years one of the most important leaders of the democratic opposition.

Born in 1938, you were, Mr. President, a Bachelor of Law in the University of Chile (1960) and a Doctor in Economics in Duke University in the U.S., six years later. This training allowed you to build a vision for the future of Chile, allying economic development, sound legislation and clear policies. You took very early a public stand and in the academic world you raised to leading positions. Your doctoral thesis in economics, written in the United States at age 28, became a success as it was published under the title *Le Concentración del poder económico en Chile*. It was a denunciation of the oligarchy that maintained the country in a state of poverty and underdevelopment. You became Chancellor of the University of Chile at age 30 and then Director of the Institute of Economics. In the seventies you were Secretary General of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences and Director of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences.

But in September 1973 a military coup backed by the United States led to the death of the elected President Salvador Allende and brought into power General Augusto Pinochet, who then imposed a dictatorship over the Chilean people for more than 16 years. Professor Lagos had to seek refuge in the United States, where he was the William R. Kenan Visiting Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Between 1978 and 1984, he held the position of Senior Economist at the United Nations Regional Employment Program for Latin America and the Caribbean.

When he returned to Chile, he quickly became a brave fighter for democracy and freedom. He called for a peaceful mobilization of the citizenry against the dictatorship in front of the cameras, on a live TV program, and he defied the dictatorship of General Pinochet.

As a leader of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, he worked for the union of the political forces of the centre and the left. In 1983 he became president of the *Alianza Democrática*, a broad coalition of the opposition.

These were difficult years for you, Mr. President, particularly during the state of siege, when terror was unleashed against protesters. Later on you were held a political prisoner by the regime for three weeks, and then released without charges. At that time you were President of the Committee of the Left for Free Elections and you were endeavoring to create the Party for Democracy. This party became one of the largest in Chile and was fundamental in the defeat of General Pinochet. In 1987 the dictator called to a single-candidate plebiscite for determining whether he was to remain in office for two more years, as the constitution imposed by him allowed. All the opposition forces rallied and cooperated in order to seize the opportunity to end the dictatorship and instaure a democratic rule. In the following autumn 55% of the Chileans voted „No”.

The first presidential elections were held in Chile in 1989, which was also the year of the fall of the Berlin wall and the beginning of a new era of democracy for the Romanians among the Eastern Europeans governed by communist regimes. Pinochet transferred his presidential powers to his successor elected in a multi-candidate presidential campaign, but he nevertheless retained the function of Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces until 1998. Now finally, after a long struggle of the democratic forces, General Pinochet is under investigation in his own country.

In that first government you were then, Mr. President, Minister of Education. In this capacity you conducted a thoroughgoing reform with respect to wide access to education and to equal opportunities. You gave diligent attention to the quality of the educational service offered to society, a which is very much shared by the Romanian academic community. The statute of the teacher, approved as a law under your ministry, confers the profession respect and dignity. The reform carried on under your supervision improved the quality of education in the poorer schools of the country, set up programs to assist students with school materials, food, and scholarships, and programs to modernize technical education.

Later on, as a Minister of Public Works under the government of President Eduardo Frei, you implemented an comprehensive plan for road

construction through private concessions that attracted more than 5 billion dollars in private sector investment. You developed social infrastructure by investing public resources in rural water systems, fishing piers for small fishermen, transportation for isolated islands, etc. You promoted infrastructure for integration by improving roads and other connections with neighboring countries in South America. After having created Fondart, a public fund for the developments of culture and the arts, you instituted a special program of "Public Works and Art," whereby major works of art were placed in the halls of new airports or railway stations, as we can see in some public facilities of Western Europe. This echoes recent reflection on the role of the arts in the contemporary community.

President Lagos is the author of several books and dozens of essays in scholarly journals, such as *Latin American Research Review*, *Estudios Internacionales*, *El Trimestre Económico*, *World Development*, *Pensamiento Iberoamericano*, and the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. Among his more renowned books are: *Chile at the Turning Point*, with F. Gil and H. Landsberger (USA, 1979), *Hacia la Democracia* (Chile, 1987), and *Después de la Transición* (Chile, 1993).

Mr. Lagos is also a member of the Distinguished Twelve Member Commission of the Socialist International, in charge of advancing proposals for the renovation of social democratic thinking in the wake of the XXI century.

He is the **President of Fundación Chile XXI**, a non-profit institution that aims at enhancing democracy, promoting exchanges of ideas and proposals for the modernization of the Chilean economy and the State, as well as the consolidation of a participatory, egalitarian, and culturally diverse society.

The Senate of the University of Bucharest - mindful of the responsibilities that are imparted today to the university as an institution not only of learning, but also of social responsibility, as an institution whose mission is, amongst other things, to show new ways of fighting injustice and iniquity, asserting itself in this manner as an advocate of right and truth in society - has decided to award Dr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar the title of *doctor honoris causa* for his outstanding contribution to the progress of democracy in the world.