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INTERVIEW WITH:
MR. ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS
EX-PRESIDENTE OF THE ECUADORIAN CONGRESS
QUITO, ECUADOR
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JOHN: To begin, how's it decided inside the block or the *bancada* (faction), what its position will be regarding a bill or a voting?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: I will refer to my party, *Izquierda Democrática* (Democratic Left), because there are substantial differences in the operation of the parties in Ecuador, of course. In our case, for daily matters, there's a block leader who summons the block of legislators (*diputados*) [to a meeting] and they resolve these matters together. When the matters are of more importance (*de transcendencia*), the block meets with the party's political commission and defines its position (*toma una definición*) based on the [party's] master lines (*líneas maestras*) [that are established] to follow in the more important cases.

JOHN: And in general, do all the co-partisans, the block members, vote together?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Yes.

JOHN: What happens if a legislator votes against the block in a disciplined voting?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: If the voting's on an important topic [*de transcendencia*] that has merited a resolution based on the party's political line, the legislator's judged inside the party through the corresponding channels (*órganos*) which are either the director or the block leader, or in extreme cases, there's a discipline tribunal.

JOHN: And are there sanctions for the legislators?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Possibly, yes, there can be.

JOHN: There can be. What are the most important factors [that cause] the legislators to not vote along with the block, or to break the discipline?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: This is a general opinion on the Congress' behavior and it doesn't necessarily refer to that of the legislators of my party. There are several reasons, there are cases where you have a phenomenon of the weakening (*debilitamiento*) of the political parties; this not only occurs at the Ecuadorian level but also at the Latin American and even at the world level. This *debilitamiento* causes there to be more and more participation by people who are with the party, but who aren't necessarily affiliated to it. These legislators are more inclined to act with independence, and sometimes this coincides (*confluye*) with their independent way of thinking. Sometimes relationships with the

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government coincide, or the necessity to satisfy needs in their provinces, in their own territories, based with contacts with the Executive's authorities. Generally, they are these types of political factors.

JOHN: Do you believe that the reform to the electoral system, I believe it was in 1997, which was the one that was changed to increase the personal vote, more or less, has had any effect on the representation in the Ecuadorian Congress?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: It hasn't had the effect of providing greater representativity to the Congress, but yes, it's had the effect of the presence of people, which in the case of the Latin American countries are considered like small *caciques* (political bosses)- I don't know if you understand the term *cacique* -.

JOHN: Yes, of course.

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: That they have a lot of influence of a personal character in their provinces; they act more according to that relationship than with a political relationship. But I don't think that anything very important, such as a greater participation of the people in politics, has been achieved.

JOHN: In the Congress are there stable multiparty coalitions that include blocks of several parties, which usually vote together?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: I was a government minister and I made an effort and succeded in establishing an organic alliance between political parties in order for the government to also work organically and according to a plan carried out by the legislators. But that doesn't occur very often, generally the coalitions (*uniones*) in the Congress are situational (*coyunturales*) and the plans don't respond to medium or long term policies.

JOHN: And what are the most important factors [that influence on] the formation of coalitions, even the situational coalitions? Are they common ideology, the electoral advantage, control over the Congress' resources or support for the Executive, or what?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: In some cases, it's the support for the Executive, in other [cases] it's more frequently the opposition to the Executive.

JOHN: How would you characterize the relationship between the legislators and the voters, the Ecuadorian citizens? As strong, weak?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Weak.

JOHN: In what sense?

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ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: There's not a permanent relationship. There's no permanent communications system, the relationships are marked by the electoral processes.

JOHN: And what do the citizens know about the legislative activities? About how they're represented by the legislators?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Very little.

JOHN: Is it due to the lack of articles in the media?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: No, there are no established channels of communication. I believe that the information is available more from what comes out in the media, from television news reports; it's information that's very partial, very incidental and it's geared towards specific events; it's not a permanent on-going type of activity.

JOHN: When is nominative voting or nominal voting used in the Congress?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Nominative voting and nominal voting are very similar. Both of these voting mechanisms express, legislator-by-legislator, their particular individual will. These procedures are always used to vote on appointments (*nombramientos*) and on aspects of great importance where there's an interest that there be a record of how each legislator has voted.

JOHN: And how does the partisan block's leadership know how the legislators of the block voted when nominative or nominal voting is not used?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: The legislative blocks aren't that numerous, they're rather small. The block with the greatest number of legislators, I believe, has 23 legislators. *Izquierda Democática* (Democratic Left) has 18 legislators in the current Congress. Over the entire era of the Republican operation (*época del funcionamiento republicano*), the most numerous party block has had a total of 32 legislators. It's not so difficult to determine their [voting] behavior.

JOHN: And there's no electronic electoral voting system in the Congress, true?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: No, there is not.

JOHN: Has the adoption of such a system been considered?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Yes, several times.

JOHN: And why hasn't it been adopted?

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ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Really, I believe that it has been more for economic reasons than anything else; due to the red tape (*trámites*) involved in installing the system; mostly for logistical reasons.

JOHN: Okay. In your opinion, what effect would the adoption of the legislative public vote, such as an electronic system that would make the communication of all the votings possible, have on the process, or for the legislative process?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: I believe that it would be positive.

JOHN: In what sense?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: That there would be a greater transparency in the attitude of the different blocks of legislators, as well as precision in the vote and more agility in the handling of the vote.

JOHN: Do the legislators in their majority want to be re-elected to the Congress? Or do they want other political positions? Or do they want to discontinue their political career? Or what?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: There's an important percentage of re-elections in the Congress. The thing is that it's a new system in Ecuador. Previously, legislators couldn't be immediately re-elected.

JOHN: Up to1997?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Up until the year 1998. So, it's the first time that the possibility of immediate re-election will be placed in effect. But there's an important percentage of legislators who seek re-election and that's positive because it gives more stability and more experience to the administration (*gestión*).

JOHN: What are the most important things [for a legislator] to do to be re-elected?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: I believe that [the most important thing is] the legislator's permanent presence in every sense, not only in specific efforts *(gestiones)*, but his general performance with the community.

JOHN: A topic that interests me, which I find more or less unique in the Ecuadorian system, is the executive initiative of economic urgency. No? What are the effects of this process on the legislative representation, on the Congress' operation?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: The [economic urgency] process signifies a lot of pressure [on the Congress] because generally congresses aren't very agile in the treatment or procedures (*trámites*) of the laws. Normally the legislation processes in our countries are slow and complicated. An economic emergency bill gives the legislators only thirty calendar days, - which in practice means twenty days - to

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inform themselves about the bill, discuss and approve it. This undoubtedly implies pressure on the legislative work, which notably decreases in other fields. When there are urgent bills from the Executive, the Congress practically devotes itself to those [bills] alone.

JOHN: I also find that this procedure has another implication; in other words, in the combination of the urgency initiative with the President's partial veto. If I understand it correctly, the implication is that the President can make the initiative and say, if the Congress, for example modifies it by majority, the President can invent **(John: in Spanish it says: *inventar*. Shouldn't this be veto??)** the modifications; for the Congress to insist on the modifications, it would then have to have two thirds. In other words, that more or less, the President can legislate with just a third of the legislators.

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: The President has a lot of power in the Ecuadorian Constitution. The Constitution that was approved in the year 1998 strengthened the presidential authority a lot, in this and in other fields.

JOHN: This was a product of a constitutional assembly, wasn' it?

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Yes.

JOHN: The thing that I find very strange is that usually constitutional assemblies have the perspective to check up on the Executive's power, no? Because a lot of times it's made up by deputies (*diputados*) or legislators. **JOHN: I've been using legislators for *diputados* throughout all of the interview...here, you use both *diputados y legisladores.***

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: This was a "sui generis" assembly, [it was] very special, where there was a very important group of legislators who knew they had a lot of possibilities of winning the next elections. Specifically, the *Democracia Popular* (Popular Democracy) and the *Partido SocialCristiano* (Social Christian Party). So, many norms were approved that tended to strengthen what they knew would be their own government. What has happened is that from the year 1998 up to now the conditions in Ecuador have changed dramatically. The problems that Ecuador experienced, especially in the economic field and which (**derivaron o derribaron??**) the political sphere of influence *(campo político*) in Mahuad's government, who was elected in 1998, are very special, dramatic I would call them.

JOHN: Then it was a more or less an unanticipated result.

ANDRES VALLEJO ARCOS: Not anticipated.

JOHN: Well, those they are all of my questions. Thank you for your time.