Alain Touraine’s speech is indeed a “Melancholic Discourse”. He begins his discourse by talking of the “relentless blend of the State, the political parties, the social movements and the civil society actors” in Latin America and argues that this makes it difficult to speak in terms of social class or to apply the European notion of State to Latin America.

Not being a specialist on Latin America, I will refrain from commenting on the political history of this region, except to say that in a region where an over-developed and dominant state has prevented the emergence of autonomous action away from the social actors, calling on the state for more redistributive intervention seems risky and needs careful analysis, reflection and debate.

For me, the fundamental question is not the relationship between the state and external agents but the nature of the state and the nature of citizenship. At the end of the day, the state represents the interests of those who help it reproduce itself. If we expect the state to be responsive to citizens, we have to first ensure the autonomy of citizens from the state and accountability of the state to its citizens.

Professor Touraine presents three major tendencies to organize public intervention in the economic field—the Third Way, neo-populism, and micro-democracy. Social policy interventions from Chile and Brazil illustrate small successes in the Third Way but the dominant paradigm in Latin America appears to be neo-populism as exemplified by Venezuela, Peru and now Bolivia.

Professor Touraine’s argues that the main process taking place in Latin America is the reconstruction of control and regulation forms compatible with globalization, but nonetheless open to political projects and struggles. He concludes that neo-populism produces neither economic growth nor social justice and seems to end on a pessimistic note with a plea for voluntaristic construction of the future.

Twenty five years ago we looked to Latin America for inspiration on ideology, theory, and social transformation, expecting Latin America to lead the way for the Third World. Despite the democratization of Latin American countries, those dynamic forces did not translate into social wellbeing for much of Latin America, which now lags behind other fast-growing regions in East and South Asia. Latin America may thus have something to learn from other regions.
I want to draw on the experience of two regions – Asia and Eastern Europe – that I am more familiar with that are following somewhat different development models, to draw some lessons that might be relevant to our discussion today.

South Asia was until recently seen as a poster-child of poverty and under-development (along with Africa, of course). Around 1990, looking at the success of the Asian tigers, most South Asian governments decided to liberalize their economy, separate the state from social actors, and invest in human capital. The process is far from complete but results speak for themselves. The four major countries – India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – have a steady record of economic growth, human capital development, poverty reduction, and healthy growth of civil society, although they now need to focus more on equity of outcomes. It is noteworthy that parallel to inter-governmental ties, professionals (e.g. university professors, journalists, lawyers) civil society has established cross-border linkages and is to strengthen regional ties for research, policy analysis and voice to exercise influence over policy makers.

Progress does not come easily and when state parties exercise control over the polity and the economy, temptations are hard to resist. For that reason, civil society in South Asia is in favor of separating the state from the economy, introducing autonomous regulatory bodies and accountability to citizens to achieve good governance. Citizenship in South Asia has a different form than that in Europe. It is more about citizen voice and social rights, than welfare rights. People no longer expect redistribution from the state. People expect a secure, enabling environment within which their own genius and labor will lead to social mobility. The state is called upon to break institutional barriers and inequality traps to create opportunity for all.

One example worth mentioning is the approval of the Social Charter by the SAARC Heads of State in January 2004, paralleled by a Citizen’s Social Charter, championed by civil society advocacy groups who argue that the official Social Charter does not go far enough. This is a good example of the use of social science to influence regional policy. Comparing results helps to trigger action among laggards and encourages flow of lessons across borders. The success of the East Asian tigers was an initial inspiration. The success of Sri Lanka in achieving high human development, and India in achieving high growth through the Knowledge Economy, has inspired others to follow.

The second example is from Eastern Europe, where I have worked the past 8 years. The driving force behind change is the vision of European integration, which allows citizens of Central and South-Eastern Europe to visualize a future that they aspire to. In the process, this is also helping to overcome old conflicts. However, transformation of institutions and behaviors takes a long time and the process appears to more robust and sustainable in countries where these processes are driven by internal drivers for change than in countries where reforms are hurriedly being legislated because EU Accessing dates are looming fast. In the latter, the policy and legislative changes are not accompanied by the establishment of capable and effective institutions, and governance problems clearly persist. Nonetheless, in all of them, the fundamental transformation of people from those ruled as subjects within an autocratic state to citizens exercising voice
is well underway and citizens of Central and Southeastern Europe are increasingly being integrated into the European economy and society.

My experience in these two regions leads me to several deductions that offer lessons for other regions as well.

1. The first lesson is that globalization presents both opportunities and risks. Professor Touraine laments the advent of neo-liberalism as being responsible for globalization. In the regions I am more familiar with globalization is taken as a fact of life, and welcomed as an opportunity for betterment. Globalization is here to stay. It consists of several globalizing flows – finance, commodities (trade), people, ideas, and services – some of which are welcomed and others considered problematic by different people.

2. The second lesson is that the impact of these trends changes over time. For example, migration patterns have changed and the flow of resources, ideas and competitive services have changed the economy, society and polity in many countries.

3. Investments in human capital pay off, but in the long run and the results are more profound when, for example, investments in primary education are accompanied by investments in higher education and skills development.

4. Human capital investments need to complemented by parallel investments in infrastructure, basic services and access to markets to unleash the productive potential of people.

5. A visible shift toward more inclusive and accountable institutions appears to be a key characteristic of these transformations. This needs to be an explicit focus of social science research and social policy.

6. Institutional reform needs to be accompanied by the creation of an enabling environment and trust-building measures to build inclusive, cohesive societies.

7. As globalization becomes a fact of life, national states are increasingly coming together to address common concerns. We should welcome the emergence of regional alliances and centers of voice, power and growth. Stronger economic and political ties need to be accompanied by robust relations among intellectuals and civil society to create a shared vision of a more cohesive, sustainable future.

In the end, I would like to quote from The Arusha Statement, issued by the participants of an important conference held in Arusha, in December 2005. “We recognize that we have before us an enormous challenge of research, analysis and implementation to achieve the objectives of social policy. We need to be modest about what we know, and what we do not know. And we need to remind ourselves that if we are to achieve social policy that is responsive to citizens, they need to be involved in the generation of knowledge, the
debate on policy formulation, and the implementation of programs. … There are many paths to socially desirable outcomes, and social policy should not fall into the trap of one-size-fits-all prescriptions. The manifestation of social policy [and economic policy] principles within countries will be the result of contestations among citizens and will invariably be a compromise between what is desirable, feasible and acceptable. This implies that policy formulation is, by definition political.” Our challenge is to direct social science towards an examination of policy choices and to use social science to promote evidence-based policy making. There is a need to do analyze, debate, listen and learn much more than we have before but also to engage with policy makers to ensure that social science influences policy. This is a very slow process and we have to be prepared to be engaged for the long haul.