1. Discovery and occupation of the Río de la Plata

Ever since the XVI century, the century characterised by the exploration and occupation of the American Continent, the name given to the area that extends all along the shores of the Río de la Plata was the "Plata" or the "Río de la Plata" region. All references to the customs, history or economy of its zone of influence are comprised under this umbrella name, which was also used for the last Viceroyalty created by the Spanish crown on American land. In fact, when Spain decided in 1776 to establish a new Viceroyalty with its main seat in Buenos Aires, after a succession of governorships which had their seat in Buenos Aires but depended on the Viceroyalty of Lima, it was created as Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. This name did not limit it to the regions neighbouring the fluvial giant but to those ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific and up to the Potosí mines, comprising the present territories of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay and part of the Chilean territory.

The Río de la Plata, also known as “River of Solis”, was the Spanish route to inland America. It was through the Río de la Plata that the Spaniards made their way to “open the land” for decades and centuries. In 1810 the emancipated government which after the independence succeeded the Viceroyalty took on the name of "United Provinces of the Río de la Plata", still today one of the official names of the Argentine Republic pursuant to article 35 of the National Constitution. From

2 Article 35 of Argentina National Constitution was introduced by the 1860 amendment, which incorporated de Buenos Aires Province, and it has not been modified by the
the beginning of the colonisation this river was sighted and later explored and from the early years of that century became the stage for claims and confrontations between the Kingdoms of Spain and Portugal and other powers of the time for its political, economic and strategic importance.

According to existing maps and records, Américo Vespucio, a pilot-major for Spain, claimed to have sailed the coast of the Atlantic Ocean up to the 50° South Latitude. Although it cannot be ascertained that he ever reached that far, it is likely that he may have gone farther than the 36°S and sailed along the mouth of the Río de la Plata in his third voyage, which took place between 1501 and 1502. His aim, according to what he had been commanded by the Spanish King, was to find the passage to the Moluccas Islands—the original “Spice Islands” in the north central part of Indonesia, so that Spain could take part in the trade of spices from the East. Vespucio does not expressly mention having navigated the Río de la Plata though this fact transpires from the records following his voyage.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that these waters were explored by Juan Díaz de Solís, a Portuguese seaman in the service of Spain, who had accompanied Vespucio in his voyages.

When Vespucio, the famous Florentine, died in 1512, Solís succeeded him as pilot-major and was commissioned by the Spanish King’s Orders (capitulaciones) of 24. November, 1514 to find a passage to the other ocean. Three ships were built, one of sixty tons and two of thirty tons, manned with a sixty-strong crew. On 8 October 1515, Solís sailed off, and after restocking in the Janeiro Bay, reached the mouth of a vast river three and a half months later. In January and February following reforms to the Constitution. The Convention convened by the government of the Buenos Aires Province on 12 May 1860 proposed to modify the name “Argentine Confederation” to “United Provinces of the Río de la Plata.” However, the following National Convention in the Santa Fe Province decided to include both denominations, apart from Argentine Republic and Argentine Nation for the enactment of laws, which properly reflects the continuity of the country since its inception in 1810. Following the 1994 amendment, Statute 24,430, which established the second publication of the official text of the National Constitution, introduced a syntactic modification to Article 35 in the texts published in the Official Gazette on 23 August 1994 and 10 January 1995, where the comma after United Provinces of the Río de la Plata. was replaced by a semicolon. This syntactic change was not adopted by the Convention nor was it rectified in the “errata” published in the Official Gazette on 24 August 1994, thus the punctuation of Article 35 is considered not to have been amended. Cf. Constitución de la Nación Argentina (Buenos Aires: Depalma, 1996), p. 42.

