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Briefing

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Uribe in the European Parliament

- Député européen (Verts, France) - Amérique latine - Colombie -



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Who is President Uribe?

On 26 May 2002, Alvaro Uribe, a dissident candidate of the liberal party, was elected president of Colombia, with 53,04 percent of the votes. The green candidate Ingrid Betancourt, kidnapped three months before, got 0,5 %. The victory is less overwhelming if one considers the low participation in the elections: only 10 out of the 23 million Colombians with a right to vote did so. In many regions, paramilitary troops forced people to vote for Uribe.

Alvaro Uribe is a *hardliner*. Back to 1982, peasant workers who tried to create a trade union on his farm "La Mundial", were assassinated by unknown killers. Later, *20 peasants were killed* on Uribe's farm "Guacharacas" by paramilitary troops who had been offered to use this farm by the Uribe family. Uribe's father Alberto was killed by the guerrilla as a revenge for this *paramilitary massacre*. Alberto Uribe was a close friend of drug baron Fabio Ochoa and got almost extradited to the US for this. His son Alvaro Uribe is said to have used his job as president of the civil aviation authority, 1980-1982, in order to give *flight licences to drug traffickers*. As mayor of Medellín, he *co-operated with drug baron Pablo Escobar* in the construction of social housing (with which the drug mafia tried to wash its image). At the end of the 80, Uribe was *close to the Medellín cartel*. When the drug war started in 1989, Uribe withdrew to the backstage, but never cut *links with the drug mafia* totally. According to the DEA (US drug enforcement agency), Pablo Moreno, Uribe's right hand while he was the governor of the province of Antioquia, transported 9850 tons of chemicals for the production of cocaine to Colombia. Another of his colleagues in the civil aviation authority, Cesar Villegas, spending 5 years in prison for drug trade, got killed some in prison some months before the presidential elections. As governor of Antioquia, Uribe *legalised the paramilitary troops CONVIVIR*.

The very well known Colombian human rights organisation ASFADDES accuses the ex-governor of *co-authorship in the assassination* of two students in 1995 in Medellín.

All this was hardly ever published in Colombian newspapers during the electoral campaign, and less since. On the contrary, Uribe managed to create the image of an anti-corruption man "with a strong hand and a wide heart", as his website says. Meanwhile, the president of the Liberal party (member of the Socialist International), Senator Piedad Córdoba, is in open opposition to Uribe. Piedad Córdoba has been kidnapped by the paramilitary and says that she gets threats from killers linked to the government.

Why is Uribe coming to the European Parliament?

On December 17, 2003, the president of the PES group, Enrique Barón Crespo, made the proposal in the conference of presidents to invite Uribe to the plenary on February 10, 2004. A final decision was postponed to the conference of presidents of January 8. Before this meeting, many NGOs had started a campaign to ask PES members to withdraw from the invitation proposal. Their argument: A president responsible for ongoing killings of trade unionists (the highest rate in the world), for dismantling constitutional guarantees, who implements the dirty war of the Plan Colombia and who supported Bush's war on Iraq should not be given a tribune in the EP. Also, the Italian DS had asked the PES to vote against the invitation. However, on January 8, the PES abstained in the vote, thus hypocritically giving the opportunity to PPE and UEN to have a majority against Greens/EFA - GUE/NGL - ELDR - EDD.

This vote and particularly the PES behaviour have had a large negative echo, even at the World Social forum Mumbai. Via Campesina and other NGOs interrupted a meeting of the Socialist International attacking Barón Crespo verbally, and the voluntary interpreters pool Babels took the floor in the press conference of the World Parliamentary

Forum for the same reason, attacking the PES member Harlem Désir who was present. (See Agence Europe and other news)

Colombia seen by the EU and the UN - latest examples

Since the beginning of the nineties, the UN human rights commissioner has set up an office in Bogotá (present head: James LeMoyne), which lists the terrible record of human rights violations (highest rate of trade unionists killed etc.) and issues *every year* very strong recommendations for implementation [1]. Colombia never does. Year after year, it is critiqued at the UN human rights session in Geneva.

In August 2003, a group of donors (24 countries from Europe and the Americas) and Colombia signed the so called Declaration of London which contains similar recommendations. No action in Colombia.

In September 2003, Uribe declared human rights defenders who oppose his "democratic security policies" as terrorist sympathisers and cowards - thus making them a target for threats and killings. Though the international community asked him to withdraw this classification, he never did.

In December 2004, Uribe adopted a decree leading to a change in the constitution. Now the so called antiterrorist statute gives judicial faculties to the military - highly critiqued by the UN and by Patten.

In January 2004, the UN commissioner for refugees, Kamel Morjane, visiting Colombia spoke of a "humanitarian crisis", classifying Colombia as the third worst country of the world, behind Sudan and the Republic of Congo.

Also in January, the head of the UN Human Rights office, LeMoyne, critiqued the reintegration programme for paramilitary and guerrilla as highly dangerous, as it channels money to the paramilitary and implies impunity for any criminal act. The Colombian government tried to have LeMoyne replaced.

Also in January 2004, Commissioner Patten travelled to Colombia insisting that the Declaration of London should be implemented. The Colombian government told the press that this was interfering in the country's internal affairs in a colonial manner. Patten softened his words on his return (!)

Equally in January 2004, the Council of Ministers adopted a position of the Member States on Colombia

Finally, the OEA (Organisation of American states) has decided *these days* a very much critiqued initiative. At the end of his mandate and obviously in order to support his compatriot, OEA president and former president of Colombia, César Gaviria, has taken the initiative to send a verification mission to Colombia on the subject of the demobilisation initiative. The UN sees this as an act to whitewash the initiative. Uribe will probably use this Gaviria initiative in order to "proof" international support for his policy

Uribe's agenda

Tuesday morning, 10 February 2004: arrival in Strasbourg and meeting with Prodi

12:00 a.m. speech in the EP plenary followed by

1:00 p.m. lunch with group presidents

5:00 p.m. Uribe addresses the AFET committee

MEPs:

3:00 p.m. *press conference* by GUE/NGL - Greens/EFA and Liberals on the situation in Colombia

3:30 - 5:00 p.m. meeting on "*Colombia: against the war and impunity - in favour of human rights and justice*" (invitation by GUE/ ELDR and Greens/EFA, with among others Mélanie Delloye, the daughter of Ingrid Betancourt; Reinaldo Villalba, human rights lawyer, Domingo Tovar from the trade unions, Gloria Cuartas, ex-mayor of a conflict region and Gustavo Petro, member of the Colombian Parliament)

What could Greens/EFA do additionally?

Since more than a decade, greens/EFA have supported the human rights activists on Colombia. We have organised three or four major conferences in the 90s and dozens of smaller meetings, the last one on December 1, 2003, on the state of compliance with UN recommendations on human rights and International Humanitarian Law, with the participation of UN office head James LeMoyne, the Colombian Vice President Santos Calderón, the Commission and the Council, Amnesty International, FIDH, Peace Brigades etc.

The last demand is a Sine Qua Non for an exchange of prisoners, among others Ingrid Betancourt.

Please find here below the

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS ON COLOMBIA TO THE IRISH EU PRESIDENCY

(OHCHR means: Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights)

We, the undersigned European human rights organisations, development agencies, solidarity groups, church groups and social organisations, respectfully request that the Irish government use its influence in the following areas:

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On the search for a negotiated solution:

Urge the Government of Colombia to derogate Decree 128 and reform the Draft Bill on reintegration of members of armed groups to conform with observations made by the OHCHR. Neither the EU nor its member states should support negotiation and demobilisation processes with armed actors which do not conform to the obligatory conditions of respect for truth, justice and reparation for victims.

Facilitate the signing of a humanitarian accord between the parties in order to guarantee the protection of the civilian population, applying the principle of distinction between the civilian population and combatants.

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Work to ensure that the aid policy of the EU and Member States towards Colombia continue to be focused on a negotiated political solution as the only viable solution to the internal armed conflict. Individual member states should abstain from bilateral policies offering military aid, as they cannot guarantee that such aid will not be used in attacks against the civilian population. It also damages the coherence of a joint European position and undermines the efforts of the Special Advisor to the Secretary General of the UN.

On the implementation of UN recommendations:

In addition to urging the Government of Colombia to comply without delay or exception with the recommendations of the OHCHR, we request that the EU put pressure on the Government of Colombia to revise the approved anti-terrorist constitutional reform and not incorporate norms that contradict human rights and humanitarian law into national legislation. It should also review other draft bills and initiatives that are incompatible with international treaties ratified by Colombia.

We would urge the EU to ask the UN Commission on Human Rights at its next session to present the interim report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the General Assembly of the UN in September 2004.

We would urge the EU to push the Government of Colombia to dismantle programmes that contravene international human rights law, such as the network of informers and peasant soldiers.

On the support, recognition, and protection for civil society:

We request that the EU urge the Government of Colombia to draw up a National Action Plan on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, in conjunction with the OHCHR and NGOs. Protection of social leaders and members of civil society organisations, especially unions, should be a priority issue in such a plan.

We request that the EU urge that the President and all state agents implement the Presidential Directive 07, 1998, and the Directive 09, 2003, from the Ministry of Defence, which protect human rights defenders.

On criteria for European Aid to Colombia:

We request that the EU insist that the Government of Colombia maintain independent administration of its European aid funds.

We urge that the EU support the resolutions of the Public Defender, and insist on the suspension of the aerial spraying programme. It should promote an evaluation and international verification of anti-drug policies, as the Swedish Presidency proposed in the third meeting of the Support Group to the Peace Process in Brussels, 30 April 2001. It should defend agreed manual eradication and substitution of illicit crops, reparation for damage caused to communities by aerial spraying and the protection of national parks.

To monitor compliance with the London Declaration, we request that the EU prepare a fixed calendar for compliance, and postpone any donor meeting until the different mechanisms of the UN show that there are serious and sustained advances in compliance with commitments made by the Government of Colombia in London.

Bearing in mind that new "Peace Laboratories" have been approved without having undertaken a proper assessment of the impact and functioning of the pilot experience, we would recommend that an evaluation of the "Peace

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Laboratory" in the Magdalena Medio region should be made public and that the EU should promote a debate about the lessons learned. The results of evaluations on EU co-operation projects in Colombia should be available to the public.

[1] in particular: dissolve paramilitary groups, end impunity, don't create private police, protect human rights defenders, don't implement the antiterrorist statute, etc. For a more complete overview, see recommendations to the Irish presidency on Colombia at the end of this text.