

## Continuing political crisis in Venezuela

One year after Juan Guaidó's self-proclamation as interim President of Venezuela, the political crisis affecting the country is far from over, as shown by the government's latest failed attempt to neutralise the opposition forces in the National Assembly. The legislative election announced by Nicolas Maduro for 2020 will not improve the country's political situation unless it is accompanied by a free and fair presidential election.

### The government tries to control the National Assembly

On [5 January 2020](#), when the National Assembly was due to elect its President for the last year of the current legislature, members of the National Guard prevented opposition MPs, including Juan Guaidó, from entering the Legislative Palace. In the session, held without the required quorum and riddled with irregularities, MPs loyal to the government elected [Luis Parra](#), a former member of the Primero Justicia (Justice First) opposition party who had been expelled for alleged corruption and later became an ally of Maduro. To counter this 'parliamentary coup,' the opposition MPs held a parallel session in the premises of the *El Nacional* newspaper, where they re-elected [Guaidó](#) by a wide margin – 100 MPs out of the 167 that make up the National Assembly. The Maduro government, despite having its tactics clearly exposed to the public through the live media coverage, immediately recognised Parra. However, the parliamentary [coup](#) was strongly condemned by the [United States](#) – which imposed [sanctions](#) on Parra and six other politicians, the Organisation of American States (OAS), the [Lima Group](#), the International Contact Group (ICG), and the EU. Even the Mexican and Argentinian [governments](#) – not signatories of the Lima Group declaration – condemned the incidents and expressed their support for legitimate legislative power and the rule of law. Only [Cuba](#), among all the countries in the [region](#), openly supported Parra.

### The National Assembly, undermined by two parallel assemblies

On 7 January 2020, Guaidó was finally allowed into the National Assembly building and was able to chair his [first session](#) of the year. However, he has not been allowed to re-enter the building since then. As a result, the National Assembly is now forced to convene [outside](#) the Legislative Palace, whereas the National Constitutional Assembly – established in 2017 – and the minority parallel assembly of pro-government MPs, led by Luis Parra, are still allowed to meet there.

### Legislative elections due at the end of 2020

The parliamentary coup weakens the [diplomatic offensive](#) recently launched by [Nicolas Maduro](#) to improve his image. Maduro has expressed his readiness to hold direct talks with the US and has pledged to hold free and fair legislative elections in 2020, allowing in international [observation](#) missions from the UN and the EU. Meanwhile, Guaidó has undertaken an [international tour](#) – including the EU and the Davos World Economic Forum – with the aim of rallying international support. The opposition maintains that free and fair presidential elections are needed to effectively solve the crisis.

### Successive attempts to undermine the National Assembly



Data source: [Infobae](#).

### Deterioration of the human rights situation and socio-economic crisis

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle [Bachelet](#), both in her [report](#) of July 2019 on human rights in Venezuela and in the [oral update](#) presented last September to the 42nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, documents cases of extra-judicial executions, torture, and arbitrary detention. As

the [crisis](#) deepens, the economy – which has shrunk over 50 % since 2014 and nearly 20 % in 2018 alone – is forecast to contract by nearly 7 % in 2020. The [situation in Venezuela](#) has been compared to that of Germany in 1923 or Zimbabwe in 2008. The official number of [Venezuelan migrants](#), refugees, and asylum-seekers is approaching [5 million](#) – an exodus without precedent in the region. Uncontrolled [gold mining](#) in the protected Orinoco region – promoted by the Government as a way to compensate for lost oil revenue – has produced dire environmental consequences and increased the levels of [violence and insecurity](#) affecting indigenous communities, and been denounced by the opposition.

## The EU maintains its position on Venezuela

On [22 January 2020](#), Juan Guaidó was received in Brussels by Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), who conveyed the 'firm support of the EU' to him as leader of the National Assembly. Borrell reiterated the [EU's commitment](#) to work for a 'peaceful and democratic resolution of the crisis, based on credible and transparent presidential and legislative elections', as the [Foreign Affairs Council](#) meeting of 20 January 2020 had done. On 9 January 2020, Borrell had issued a [declaration](#) on behalf of the EU on the latest developments regarding the Venezuelan National Assembly, expressing the EU's full support to Guaidó as President of the National Assembly and rejecting the violations of its democratic functioning and the intimidation and violence against its members. Borrell also announced the EU's readiness to consider applying new targeted measures against the individuals responsible for these violations. Prior to this announcement, Borrell had issued a [declaration](#) on 21 December 2019, following the Venezuelan Supreme Court decision to strip four MPs of their parliamentary immunity. The EU helped establish the International Contact Group on Venezuela (ICG), which has been working to facilitate conditions for a political and peaceful process leading to new presidential elections. The [ICG](#) recently announced its support to Guaidó as President of the National Assembly and restated its commitment to back genuine efforts to solve the crisis. The Council of the EU first introduced [targeted sanctions](#) against Venezuela on 13 November 2017, renewing them in 2018 and 2019. On 27 September 2019, it added seven members of the Venezuelan security and intelligence forces to the list of individuals affected by EU sanctions. During his visit to Brussels, Guaidó called for [additional sanctions](#) targeting gold mining and trading in Venezuela. The EU has contributed [€117.6 million](#) since 2018 to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the region.

## And the EP reiterates its support to Guaidó

On 16 January 2020, the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on 'the situation in Venezuela after the illegal election of the new National Assembly Presidency and Bureau (parliamentary coup)', recognising and supporting Guaidó as the legitimate President of the National Assembly and interim President of Venezuela, condemning the attempted parliamentary coup, reiterating its full support for the National Assembly 'as the only legitimately elected democratic body of Venezuela', and recalling the EU's readiness to support a genuine process leading to a 'peaceful and democratic resolution of the crisis'. The EP called on the HR/VP to 'step up the EU's response, including through the extension of targeted sanctions' against individuals responsible for human rights violations and repression. Moreover, the EP requested that a fact-finding mission be sent to Venezuela to assess the situation. The resolution followed a [speech](#) by HR/VP Josep Borrell to the plenary. In the current legislature, the EP adopted a resolution on the [situation in Venezuela](#) in July 2019. The EP first recognised Guaidó as interim President in [January 2019](#). On 20 January 2020, Guaidó met with leaders of political groups in the EP in Brussels.

## Outlook

The latest attempt by the Maduro government to gain control of the democratically elected National Assembly shows that the legislative elections announced for 2020, even if free, fair and supervised by international observers, would not solve the political crisis in Venezuela. If the government considers the results unfavourable, it may decide to block the work of the newly elected Parliament or to continue with the National Constitutional Assembly assuming its legislative powers. Thus, the only way out of the crisis would be through a negotiated solution with the opposition with a view to holding a free and fair presidential election, monitored by international observers. The [EU and the ICG](#) could help to find that [solution](#) by keeping the pressure on Maduro through their targeted sanctions, while at the same time multiplying their diplomatic efforts to engage the government and opposition in a real dialogue.

