

# New political dialogue and 2021 elections in Venezuela

The Mexico dialogue between the Venezuelan government and opposition, as well as the latter's decision to run in the 21 November 2021 local and regional elections, have revived hopes for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the country's political conflict. Nevertheless, the Maduro government has suspended the third round of negotiations, dimming prospects for a successful outcome of the dialogue. The EU is observing the elections.

## A fresh attempt at dialogue between government and opposition

After several failed attempts at negotiation, the Venezuelan government and opposition (the latter now grouped in a wider [Unitary Platform](#)) started a [new dialogue](#) in [Mexico City](#), facilitated by Norway and accompanied by Russia and the Netherlands. The parties signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU), which set the [guidelines](#) for the process, and established the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, yet partial agreement on urgent measures is possible. A [first round of negotiations](#) was held on 13-15 August 2021. A [second round](#), held on 3-6 September, achieved 'a [partial agreement](#) for the social protection of the Venezuelan people', aimed at defusing the economic crisis and [humanitarian emergency](#) gripping the country. A [third round](#), planned for 24-27 November 2021, had 'respect of the constitutional rule of law' at the top of its agenda; however, the Venezuelan government [suspended](#) the talks following the extradition of businessman [Alex Saab](#) (recently appointed as a representative of the Venezuelan government in the [dialogue](#)) from Cape Verde to the US over accusations of money-laundering. The opposition and [Norway](#) have urged Maduro to resume talks; the [US](#) has reiterated its support for keeping the dialogue alive.

Figure 1 – Failed talks between the Venezuelan government and opposition (2014-2019)



Data source: [CSIS](#), Rendon A. and Fernandez C, Lessons for Negotiations in Venezuela: A Roadmap, 24 May 2021.

## The opposition's new strategy

The Mexico dialogue [MoU](#) refers to the opposition as represented by Venezuela's **Unitary Platform**. Although some [experts](#) consider this a mere formality, others say it stands for a participation that is wider and more inclusive (over [40 political organisations](#)) than that of the [interim government](#) presided by opposition leader [Juan Guaido](#). Although some analysts and opposition leaders believe that the dialogue would bring [little benefit](#) to the country, over 50 % of [Venezuelans](#), while sceptical, seem to favour it.

In May 2021, [Henrique Capriles](#) (a former presidential candidate and supporter of the Unitary Platform) defended the [international observation](#) of the November 2021 regional and local elections, and suggested changing the opposition's strategy, whose [position](#) had weakened after the 2019 parliamentary election. On 11 August 2021, [Capriles](#) called on the opposition to 'join forces' and present unitary candidacies. On 31 August, the main [Venezuelan opposition](#) parties announced they would participate in the 21 November elections under the Democratic Unity Roundtable ([MUD](#)) ([reinstated](#) by the CNE). This move put an end to three years of boycott and to calls for abstention (which started with the 2018 presidential elections, and led to the appointment of [Juan Guaido](#) as interim president). The parties also underlined that [this decision](#) complements the Mexico dialogue efforts. [Guaido](#) has nevertheless declared that the conditions for free and fair elections need further reinforcing, and other opposition leaders are reticent to participate. A survey

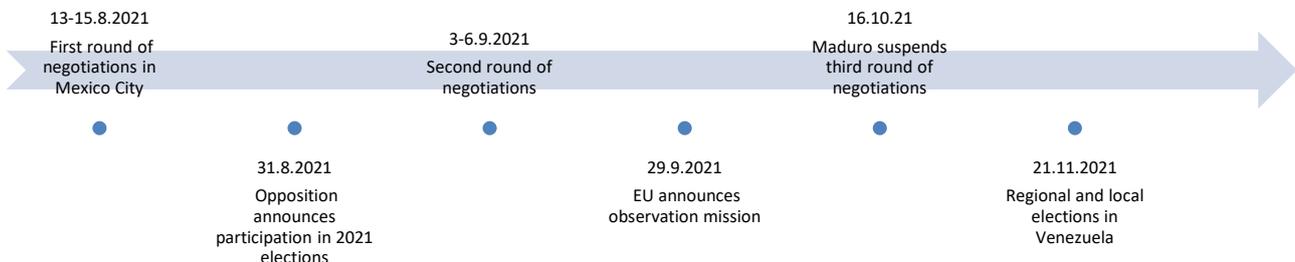
shows that, despite the differences of opinion, nearly [57%](#) of the opposition supporters are willing to vote. According to experts, a [low voter turnout](#) would benefit the Maduro government. Although the 2021 elections are regional and local, [Unitary Platform leaders](#) argue that they are a first step in mobilising the voters, increasing chances for political change and influencing the ongoing dialogue. Experts explain the opposition's change of strategy with events such as the recent [renewal](#) of the National Electoral Council (CNE), in which two of the newly appointed members (out of a total of five) have no links to the Maduro government; the authorisation by the government of access to [humanitarian aid](#); and the fact that the [Biden administration](#) seems more open to a negotiated solution than his predecessor's. Furthermore, the Mexico dialogue envisages the elaboration of an electoral schedule and guarantees for transparent elections.

### 7-point Venezuelan dialogue agenda

1. Political rights for all.
2. Electoral guarantees for all. Schedule for observable and transparent elections.
3. Lifting of sanctions. Restoration of the right to assets.
4. Respect for the constitutional rule of law.
5. Political and social coexistence. Renunciation of violence. Reparation for the victims of violence.
6. Protection of the national economy and social protection measures for the Venezuelan people.
7. Guarantees of implementation, follow-up and verification of what has been agreed.

Source: Globovision, text of the MoU.

Figure 2 – Timeline of 2021 events



Source: Prepared by the author.

## The role of the EU

On 29 September 2021, HR/VP [Josep Borrell](#) announced that, in view of the opposition's decision to participate, the EU would send an election observation mission (EOM) to the country, with MEP [Isabel Santos](#) (S&D, Portugal) as chief observer. The EU EOM has a core team of 11 election experts (deployed in Caracas since October) and up to 62 long-term observers (deployed in the regions since the end of October). Some 54 short-term observers will reinforce the mission on election day. The EOM will remain in Venezuela until the end of the electoral process. Although the EU's decision has received some [criticism](#), an EEAS spokesperson has insisted that 'the deployment of an EOM in no way represents a legitimisation of an election'; that it is 'fully consistent with the EU position on Venezuela'; and that it can be withdrawn if [conditions](#) are no longer met. The UN has sent a [panel of electoral experts](#), and [Russia](#) is also observing the voting. On 25 June 2021, the EU, the US and Canada issued a [joint statement](#) welcoming the 'advancements to restore core democratic processes and institutions in Venezuela'; expressing their willingness to review sanctions policies if there is meaningful progress in the ongoing negotiations; and calling for 'electoral conditions that abide by international standards for democracy'. This is a significant shift from the previous US stance on Venezuela under President [Trump](#), focused on imposing maximum pressure on the Maduro regime through sanctions.

The **European Parliament** has long supported a democratic solution in Venezuela. Besides contributing to the EU [EOM](#) (in which the [EPP Group](#) has decided not to participate on the grounds that the elections will be used to validate the Nicolás Maduro regime), on 18 July 2019 the EP adopted a resolution on [the situation in Venezuela](#), reaffirming that 'a peaceful, democratic and inclusive solution is the only sustainable way out of the current political impasse' and supporting dialogue between the parties. In its previous term (2014-2019), the EP adopted 10 resolutions on Venezuela. In 2017, it awarded its Sakharov Prize to the country's [democratic opposition](#).

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2021.

