European Parliament

2019-2024



Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America

DCAM_PV(2023)0302

MINUTES

of the meeting of 2 March 2023, 14.00-16.00

Brussels

The meeting opened at 14.07 on Thursday, 2 March 2023, with Tilly Metz (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of draft agenda

OJ - PE629.267v01-00

The agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of minutes of meetings

DCAM of 19 October 2022

PV - PE629.265v01-00

• DCAM of 17 November 2022

PV - PE629.266v01-00

These minutes were adopted.

3. Chair's announcements

The Chair announced the change of a destination country of the delegation visit planned for May. Instead of going to Belize as originally planned, the Delegation will visit the Dominican Republic, the second country to be visited being Costa Rica.

4. Presentation of the mission report of the DCAM Mission to Honduras and Guatemala (31 October - 4 November 2022) CR - PE629.268v01-00

with the participation of:

• H.E. Mr José Lambour Peñalonzo, Ambassador of Guatemala to the European Union

PV\1274127EN.docx PE629.269v02-00

- H.E. Ms Viviane de Pierrefeu, Chargé d'affaires, Mission of Honduras to the European Union
- Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2), European External Action Service (EEAS)

The Chair presented the mission report, stating that the mission took place at a crucial time in both countries. In Honduras, the new left-wing government under President Xiomara Castro had raised many hopes, but implementation of concrete reform actions of the government seemed to be stalled, and many sectors of society were becoming impatient. The Chair commended the efforts of the government to set up a new anti-corruption body under the auspices of the UN and the abolition of the special economic zones, which had become a state in the state. In Guatemala, systematic attacks against judges and other justice operators had signalled a worrying deterioration of the rule of law ahead of the next general elections scheduled for 25 June 2023. The Chair said that a return to an efficient fight against corruption was not to be expected in the near future. The upcoming elections probably will not change the political situation in Guatemala, since critical candidates are likely to be banned from the elections. This impression was confirmed by the recent decision by the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Court not to allow Thelma Cabrera and Jordán Rodas to run as presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The Chair noted that Guatemala's strong economy has not translated into improvements in reducing poverty, malnutrition and violence.

H.E. Mr José Lambour Peñalonzo, Ambassador of Guatemala to the European Union, emphasised the importance of the mission for strengthening the relationship between the European Parliament and Guatemala and stressed that the Guatemalan authorities very much supported the visit. The Ambassador stressed that Guatemala is converging with the EU in its principles and values, such as keeping the peace. The country participates in several UN peace missions and supports Ukraine against the invasion of Russia.

H.E. Ms Viviane de Pierrefeu, Chargé d'affaires, Mission of Honduras to the European Union expressed her hope that the mission had allowed the Members to gain a comprehensive view of the country's situation, which has faced many political, economic, and social challenges. She underlined that the respect for sovereignty and self-determination were essential pillars in international relations. Ms. Pierrefeu emphasised that an honest exchange and the renunciation of stereotyping of Central America are crucial. She underlined the importance of discussing not only politics but also social justice, access to education, and respect for human rights.

Duccio Bandini Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2) EEAS, declared that the EU wants to strengthen its relationship with Central America and the recent DCAM visit contributed to this goal. The DCAM delegation noted signs of impatience in the Honduran society at the lack of progress in implementing reforms, but the EU remains willing to work with President Castro's government and supports the reform agenda. The EU is pleased with Guatemala's support for Ukraine, but is concerned about the increasing pressure on the judiciary and the deterioration of the rule of law in in the country. The EU calls on the Guatemalan government to guarantee the human rights of the judicial operators and human rights defenders detained. Finally, the EU also calls on the Guatemalan government to ensure that economic growth is sustainable and inclusive.

Members expressed disappointment at Honduras' abstention in a United Nations General Assembly vote on Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory. They emphasised the importance of respect for sovereignty, international law, and territorial integrity in the international community. Mission participants said that the trip to Honduras was positive and allowed them to better judge the new government's efforts to develop the country and to fight poverty. Members underscored the importance of the upcoming elections in June in Guatemala. They also stressed the need to improve the inclusion of minorities and civil society in the political system to strengthen Guatemalan democracy. Members also deplored the high levels of poverty in both Honduras and Guatemala.

Speakers: Javier Nart (Renew/ Spain), Sara Cerdas (S&D/ Spain, on behalf of Alicia Homs), Leopoldo López Gil (EPP/ Spain).

5. Exchange of views on the security situation in Central America,

with the participation of:

- Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2), European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Douglas Farah, President of the National Security Consulting firm IBI Consultants and former Washington Post reporter (via videoconference)
- Andrew D. Selee, President of the Migration Policy Institute (via videoconference)
- Ana María Mendez, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) (via videoconference)

Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division -Amercicas.2 - European External Action Service (EEAS), began his statement by describing the worrying situation in Central America and particularly in the Northern Triangle, regarding gang crimes and drug trafficking. He pointed to the lack of states' commitment to protect their populations, for whom violence is a key concern. He underlined that violence and insecurity fuel emigration and internal displacements. In the past 20 months, the U.S. counted 1.4 million arrivals from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The European Union has programmes in place to fight transnational organised crime and reinforce the national justice systems such as EL PAcCTO (Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime) y Copolad (Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies). Mr. Bandini identified issues that need to be addressed to make joint action more effective, such as socio-economic conditions and regional cooperation. In this context, he underlined that the current EU programs in El Salvador and Honduras have a specific scope about gender violence and prevention. He stressed the EU's concerns about the overuse of the state of emergency and the deteriorating human rights situation. The EEAS is particularly alarmed by the strong link between organised crime and politics. He said that the atomisation of cartel groups and the diversification of organised crime's activities add complexity to the fight against crime. Mr. Bandini concluded his intervention underlining the key role of cooperation and the EU's concerns about the high level of violence concerning vulnerable groups such as indigenous populations, women, human rights defenders and refugees.

Douglas Farah, president of the National Security Consulting firm IBI and former Washington Post reporter highlighted the militarisation of the Northern Triangle countries in all its aspects. He expressed concern about the Bukele model, which he considers the most advanced in terms of militarisation. Mr. Farah emphasised that the Salvadoran model could spread throughout the region and that states such as Honduras were already adopting it. He underlined the increasing integration of gangs into the political sphere, which has been happening gradually since 2012. He stated that gang members are found within the police and institutions. In his closing remarks, he highlighted Bukele's wide reach across various social media platforms, which, together with his highly coordinated communication strategy, enabled him to successfully dominate the national public discourse.

Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute, explained that the region has experienced significant migration flows already for several decades. However, he distinguished recent population movements from previous ones, pointing out that current migration has some characteristics of crisis displacements. He stated that migration to the United States and neighbouring countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico has intensified. Mr. Selee highlighted that the sub-region is marked by a great diversity of migratory flows. The expert pointed out that the Central American States have tried to improve their migratory regulation.

Ana María Mendez, Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA), expressed her concerns about the rise of the authoritarian practice in the sub-region. She highlighted three dimensions of this: repressive policies, the violation of human rights and international laws, and the uncontrolled use of the state of exception. She mentioned the example of Guatemala, which makes excessive use of the state of emergency to repress indigenous communities. She explained that the Salvadoran model influenced other Central American states such as Guatemala and Honduras. Ms. Mendez highlighted the existence of structural impunity and the breakdown of the rule of law. She denounced the lack of independence of the judicial system and the impossibility of dealing impartially with certain issues such as the assassinations of LGBTQIA+ people, journalists or human rights defenders. She also denounced the closure of the civic space in several countries of the region. Freedom of speech and expression is not respected and the state of emergency has been used as a means to stifle dissenting voices and quash opponents. She concluded her speech by recommending that the European Parliament put diplomatic pressure on governments to commit to respecting human rights.

Members took the floor to emphasize the difficulty of defining appropriate aid in this context. On the one hand, Bukele is idolised in El Salvador and going against him would be seen as interference in internal affairs, on the other hand his exercise of power violates human rights. They also expressed concern that could potentially be exported to other states in the region and highlighted the need for states to regain the trust of their citizens.

Speakers: Leopoldo López Gil (EPP/Spain), Javi López (S&D/Spain), Javier Nart (Renew/Spain).

6. Exchange of views on the situation of the Nicaraguan political prisoners after their expulsion to the USA,

with the participation of:

- Dora Maria Téllez, former member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) & former Health Minister under the FSLN administration (via videoconference)
- Felix Maradiaga, University Professor, candidate for the Presidency for the Unidad Azul y Blanco (via videoconference)
- Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2), European External Action Service (EEAS)

Dora Maria Téllez former member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) & former Health Minister under the FSLN administration expressed her gratitude to Javier Nart MEP and the European Parliament for their unwavering support and attention to the plight of Nicaraguan political prisoners. She stressed the vulnerability of the expelled opponents, rendered stateless by the Ortega-Murillo regime. Ms Téllez explained that those without family members in the US and pending work permits are living in unstable conditions, facing economic difficulties, mental health problems, and uncertainty about their families' lives. To address these issues, she called for additional social protection to be added to the citizenship offered by several countries. Ms Téllez also noted that the regime restricts the entry of religious personnel to the country and represses their free exercise of faith, particularly in the case of the Catholic Church.

Felix Maradiaga, former candidate for the Presidency for the Unidad Azul y Blanco, remained deeply concerned about the situation of the children of the expelled political opponents, who are being denied passports by the Nicaraguan government because one of their parents does not exist in the civil registry. According to Mr. Maradiaga, the release of political prisoners without conditions demonstrates a failure on the part of the regime to extract concessions from the West. He warned that, a transition to democracy would be difficult to achieve under the regime's continued policy of terror.

Duccio Bandini welcomed the Spanish decision to grant nationality to Nicaraguan political prisoners and expressed the EU's satisfaction with their release, but he emphasized that they never should have been imprisoned in the first place. He added that the EU is currently exploring the possibility of providing social support to the expelled opponents since the EU already has assistance programs dedicated to supporting advocates for human rights. The EU is currently determining whether these programs can be applied to assist the Nicaraguan opponents. Mr. Bandini stressed the importance of continuing to condemn the human rights violations committed by the Ortega regime.

Members pointed out that the Nicaraguan political prisoners require more help, especially medical attention for those with physical and psychological traumas. They called for aid from institutions such as the EU or the OAS to address this situation. Members said that the release of Nicaraguan political prisoners means only a partially satisfying outcome, since their release did not meet international legal standards, particularly the decree rendering them stateless.

Speakers: Javier Nart (Renew/ Spain), Leopoldo López Gil (EPP/ Spain), Javi López (S&D/ Spain)

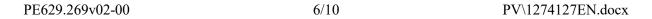
7. Any other business

None.

8. Date and time of the next meeting

The date and venue of the next DCAM meeting will be communicated later on.

The meeting closed at 16.14.



ΠΡΊΓ C'DCTBEH JIÚCT/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/ ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATAΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΏΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/ LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REĢISTRS/DALYVIŲ SĄRAŠAS/ JELENLÉTI ÍV/REĠISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŚCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/ LISTĂ DE PREZENŢĂ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/NÄRVAROLISTA

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Tilly Metz (P), Javier Nart (VP)		
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Sara Cerdas, Leopoldo López Gil		
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H.E. Mr José Lambour Peñalonzo, Ambassador of Guatemala to the European Union	Item 4	
H.E. Ms Viviane de Pierrefeu, Chargé d'affaires, Mission of Honduras to the European Union		
Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2), European External Action Service (EEAS)		
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Duccio Bandini, Deputy Head of Division, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (AMERICAS.2), European External Action Service (EEAS)	
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• Dora Maria Téllez, former member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) & former Health Minister under the FSLN administration (via videoconference)

Item 6

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Други участници/Otros participantes/Ostatní účastníci/Endvidere deltog/Andere Teilnehmer/Muud osalejad/Επίσης παρόντες/Other participants/Autres participants/Drugi sudionici/Altri partecipanti/Citi klātesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Partecipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Alţi participanţi/Iní účastníci/Drugi udeleženci/Muut osallistujat/Övriga deltagare

Embassy of Costa Rica: Guillermo Rojas Vargas

Embassy of El Salvador: Ana Margarita Hassin de Sevilla Embassy of Guatemala: José Lambour, Gabriel Oreliana

Embassy of Honduras: Viviane de Pierrefeu

Embassy of Panama: Kashany Rios

Секретариат на политическите групи/Secretaría de los Grupos políticos/Sekretariát politických skupin/Gruppernes sekretariat/ Sekretariat der Fraktionen/Fraktsioonide sekretariaat/Грαμματεία των Πολιτικών Ομάδων/Secretariats of political groups/Secretariat des groupes politiques/Тајпіštva klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariāts/Frakcijų sekretoriai/ Képviselőcsoportok titkársága/Segretarjat gruppi politici/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secretariado dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupín/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliitisten ryhmien sihteeristöt/ De politiska gruppernas sekretariat

PPE Hugo van der Werff

S&D Luca Fossati, Eleni-Eirini Psaroudaki

Renew Itziar Munoa Salaverria

Verts/ALE Garance Tardieu

ID Sakari Linden

ECR The Left NI

Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantselei/Γραφείο του Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsjednika/Gabinetto del Presidente/Priekšsēdētāja kabinets/Pirmininko kabinetas/Elnöki hivatal/Kabinett tal-President/Kabinet van de Voorzitter/Gabinet Przewodniczącego/Gabinete do Presidente/Cabinet Preşedinte/Kancelária predsedu/Urad predsednika/Puhemiehen kabinetti/Talmannens kansli

Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretærens Kabinet/ Kabinett des Generalsekretærs/Peasekretäri büroo/Γραφείο του Γενικού Γραμματέα/Secretary-General's Office/Cabinet du secrétaire général/Ured glavnog tajnika/Gabinetto del Segretario generale/Ģenerālsekretāra kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/ Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinett tas-Segretarju Ġenerali/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalnega sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/ Generalsekretærans kansli

Directorat Generali/Directoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditel'stvo/Generalni direktorat/Pääosasto/Generaldirektorat DG PRES DG IPOL DG EXPO Juan Carlos Jimenez Marin DG EPRS DG COMM DG PAPA DG PERS DG INLO DG TRAD DG LINC DG FINS DG ITEC DG SAFE Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Õigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/ Service juridique/Pravna služba/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisės tarnyba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/ Wydział prawny/Servico Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právny servis/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättstjänsten Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariát výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschusssekretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Γραμματεία της επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétariat de la commission/Tajništvo odbora/Segreteria della commissione/ Komitejas sekretariāts/Komiteto sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Segretarjat tal-kumitat/Commissiesecretariaat/ Sekretariat komisji/Secretariado da comissão/Secretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottssekretariatet Helmut Weixler, David Chico, Silvia Cannalire Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistenz/Boηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padėjėjas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočnik/ Avustaja/Assistenter Rebecca Alrutz

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- * (P) = Πρεμτεματεπ/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/Pirmininkas/Elnök/'Chairman'/Voorzitter/Przewodniczący/Preşedinte/Predseda/Predsednik/Puheenjohtaja/Ordförande
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