



Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America

12.07.2023

MISSION REPORT

following the visit to the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica from 15 to 19 May 2023

Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America

Members of the mission

Tilly Metz	(Greens/EFA) (Leader of the mission)
Javier Nart	(Renew Europe)
Leopoldo López Gil	(EPP)
Sara Cerdas	(S&D)
Teuvo Hakkarainen	(ECR)
Stelios Kouloglou	(The Left)
Sabrina Pignedoli	(Non-attached)

Introduction

The Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America (DCAM) sent seven Members to the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica for a mission that ran from 15 to 19 May 2023. This was the first time that DCAM visited the Dominican Republic, which is also covered by the European Parliament's Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

This mission also took place a few days before the presentation (on 7 June 2023) of a Joint Communication by the European Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President intitled "A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean" aimed to build a closer and modernised strategic partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean. The New Agenda seeks to foster the EU-LAC strategic partnership that is grounded on common democratic values, multilateralism and digital transition, with inclusiveness and human-centered approaches at its core.

At their meetings in the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, the participating Members held exchanges of views on a wide range of issues, which are summarised in this report, and met with leading public authorities, including the President of the Dominican Republic, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Presidents and Members of the Parliaments of the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. The participating Members also met with a broad spectrum of social partners and representatives of civil society organisations in both countries.

The participating Members thanked the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica for their support for Ukraine, as reflected in their vote on the UN General Assembly resolutions^{1 2} condemning the invasion of Ukraine and on other international resolutions on the issue, and stated that they viewed this as a demonstration of these countries' alliance with the EU and respect for the principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

Summary account of meetings and topics discussed

Migration

The main topic addressed in both countries was migration and its multiple consequences. The Dominican Republic has received a high influx of Haitian migrants (it is estimated that half a million Haitians are living in the Dominican Republic) who flee their country due to the institutional collapse in Haiti and the ensuing catastrophic political, economic, social, humanitarian and security situation there. The Dominican authorities face a saturation of their reception and regularisation centres for immigrants and of their social services (in particular in the sectors of health and education), and fear the emergence of outbreaks of racism and xenophobia within the local population and the spread of political instability and crime in their territory. This being so, they are adopting a number of measures ranging from the construction of walls at the border, the tightening of entry requirements for migrants or the establishment of industrial zones on the border to give a job and, therefore, economic and social opportunities to the Haitian population living near the border. In any case, Haitian migration to the Dominican

¹ Resolution ES-11/1 of 2 March 2022 entitled 'Aggression against Ukraine'.

² Resolution A/ES-11/L.7 of 23 February 2023 entitled "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine".

Republic, due to its volume and characteristics, as well as to its potential for political, economic and social destabilisation in the host State, can be characterised as a national emergency.

The authorities of the Dominican Republic clearly expressed their sense of abandonment on the part of the international community and demanded greater attention and means to solve this problem. The participating Members took good note of the requests of the Dominican authorities, recalled the humanitarian assistance provided to Haiti by the EU and the international community at large and stressed that the solution to the conflict in Haiti must arise from Haitians. However, given the scale and features of the conflict, there was a general agreement on the need for an enhanced involvement of the international community, with the United Nations at the front.

The participating Members visited the Dominican-Haitian border in the town of Dajabón and were able to see the gravity of the situation. However, they also visited the facilities of the Codevi Industrial Park and Free Zone, dedicated to textile production, which mainly employs Haitian border population and which is a reference as regards the protection of labour rights and socio-economic development. This visit demonstrated that it is possible to establish links between Haiti and the Dominican Republic that generate stability, industrial collaboration, employment and progress, provided that stability in the area is guaranteed. At the same time, it was pointed out that investments at the border, for example in the areas of vocational training and employment promotion, can contribute to a positive transformation of the situation.

During their visit to Costa Rica, the participating Members were able to see first-hand the mass migration of Nicaraguans fleeing poverty and the political oppression of Daniel Ortega's totalitarian regime. While Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica has been a constant for more than 25 years, the current figures are unprecedented, as they have seen a fivefold increase in recent years. Nicaraguan migration adds to that of nationals from other Caribbean and South American countries, mainly Venezuela, who use Costa Rica as a transit territory to the north, mainly to the United States.

As in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rican authorities highlighted their difficulties in managing huge flows of migrants and granting work and residence permits and responding to asylum applications within reasonable timeframes, and mentioned the strain that migration caused in their health and education services. They also noted the risks that the migration crisis may generate in terms of political polarisation, incitement to extremism, hate speech and xenophobia, and degradation of the country's public finances and economic climate.

Costa Rica is the fourth country in the world in number of requests for refuge, and its foreign population (mostly of Nicaraguan origin) already reaches 10 % of the total population. Historically, Costa Rica has had a very generous asylum policy, but the increase in migration has triggered a social reaction and the authorities have restricted the conditions of asylum and residence to migrants and refugees, as have other countries in the region, and are now calling for international cooperation.

The participating Members had the opportunity to visit a UNHCR asylum application management centre. The need for more human and financial resources was stressed, given that these have not grown at the same rate as applications, and this is creating long waiting lists for regularisation, which leads to situations of vulnerability for migrants and can be the seed of crime.

It was concluded that if migrant flows are not well managed and irregular migration cannot be

tackled, social stability in Costa Rica may be at risk. The key is to achieve the social and labour integration of migrants.

Organised crime and drug trafficking

Authorities in the Dominican Republic and in Costa Rica highlighted the risks to their security and to their political, economic and social stability posed by the increased activity of criminal and drug trafficking organisations in their territories. In the case of the Dominican Republic, the fear is based in the continuing deterioration of the situation in Haiti, the absence of valid interlocutors and the risk of an extension to the Dominican Republic of the action of the criminal organisations operating in Haiti. For that reason, they called for urgent and decisive international action to help the neighbouring country to put an end to violence, achieve its stabilisation, re-establish the rule of law and restore an effective government, as a preliminary step for the provision of aid that contributes to the sustainable development of Haiti. Additionally, particular attention should be paid to aspects such as the protection of children and young people, the environment and the reforestation of the territory, food security, and basic services provision.

In Costa Rica, shortly before the start of the mission, alarming figures were published about the increase in crime and violent deaths in the country, which resulted in changes in the Ministry of the Interior and the adoption of drastic measures against a situation that has caused alarm in a society that had never known such high levels of crime. Its increase is linked to the growing activity of transnational drug trafficking organisations in the country and the emergence of local cartels, as well as the use of Costa Rican territory and ports as a logistics base and a transit zone for drugs, which are shipped to the United States and Europe. Increased drug consumption has also been identified among Costa Ricans.

In both countries, the rise in crime affects national security, political stability and social peace. In their meetings with participating Members, the authorities called for international police and judicial collaboration, and Costa Rica reported that it is developing rules to cut off financing and money laundering activities of drug traffickers, and that more scanners are being bought to locate drugs in containers to be shipped to other countries.

Meetings with social partners. Situation of women and the LGTBI+ community

Despite the generally favourable economic situation in the two countries visited, cases of inadequate delivery of basic services and pockets of poverty persist, particularly among vulnerable groups such as migrants, children and adolescents, as well as women. Social inequality remains a problem. The authorities of both countries recognised the need to increase the tax burden, social spending and the provision of basic services, and to achieve a better redistribution of income.

In the Dominican Republic, the need to strengthen institutional capacity and improve some of its infrastructures and services, in particular education, was highlighted. Reference was also made to the need to eliminate informality in the labour market, which will contribute to better social integration and reduced vulnerability.

In Costa Rica, a gradual reduction in the space for civil society organisations and journalists was denounced. Interlocutors also warned of a progressive loss of purchasing power of the once-important middle class, which could break the social pact that has underpinned the country's well-being for decades, and that is said to be partly due to insufficient public spending

for the country's current needs. To fight against poverty which, according to statistics from international organisations, reaches 25 % of the population, the Costa Rican government announced that it would do its best to develop the border and coastal areas of the country, where poverty is more widespread, and called for the application of the principle of "development in transition" in order not to be deprived of the aid that international organisations withdraw from States that reach upper-middle income status.

In the area of gender, the levels of teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence and femicides remain high in both countries. In the Dominican Republic, measures for the protection of the rights of girls and women have been delayed due to pressure from certain sectors, and by the persistence of a macho mentality in society. Similar problems exist in Costa Rica, where women's participation in the formal labour market is also among the lowest in Latin America. Regarding the protection of the LGBTI+ collective, the groups consulted stated that the situation in both countries is better than in neighbouring States, although there is still discrimination, mainly in the fields of employment, education and health. In addition, some homophobic manifestations from public authorities are said to go against the integration of this group.

Energy and the environment

The environmental and energy issues also focused the exchanges of views with various interlocutors. Authorities in the Dominican Republic stressed that the country is home to enormous biodiversity and is promoting eco-tourism, and evoked its investments in habitat conservation and reforestation, and the preparation of a law on water management. This country is vulnerable to climate change, for which it is barely responsible, and has recently experienced the worst drought in the last 40 years, which has affected its agricultural income and food security. Another problem that it suffers, due to climate change, is the proliferation of algae (sargazos) on its coasts, which may have a negative effect on tourism, one of the country's primary sources of income. Given the magnitude of the problem, the authorities of the Dominican Republic have requested financial and technical assistance from the international community.

For many years, Costa Rica has been a model of sustainable development and good environmental management, and remains a regional leader in environmental management and circular economy. This has given it many benefits, of which a rise in revenue from tourism is a good example. Similarly, the field visit carried out by the participant Members to ICAFE (a non-state public institution that promotes the coffee sector, and guarantees quality and sustainability of Costa Rican coffee through innovation and inclusive participation) showed the benefits of sustainable farming and its potential for improved livelihoods.

Costa Rica has adopted policies to reduce the use of fossil fuels, and its authorities affirm that 99.4 % of its electricity comes from renewable sources, and that they are working on electrification of transport.

Costa Rican authorities noted that sewage sanitation and recycling awareness were being addressed, and recalled that Costa Rica will co-organise the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2025. Costa Rica is a country exposed to natural disasters and to the effects of climate change, and its authorities said that they are investing in conservation, prevention and resilience. However, they also complained that their determined action in favour of preserving the environment has not been matched with international aid, while less compliant countries have

received funds.

However, Costa Rican environmental organisations lamented about insufficient investment in environmental protection, the lack of effective implementation of some environmental standards and the lack of long-term sustainability of some projects. They also commented on cases of occupations of indigenous land by ranchers.

Meeting with the Nicaraguan opposition

The participating Members met in San José with a broad representation of opponents to the Nicaraguan regime made up of politicians, journalists and activists. They made a grim assessment of the situation in the country, characterised by repression, lack of freedoms and the closure of spaces for dialogue with institutions, such as the Church and civil society organisations, which could have helped to get the country out of the current political blockade. They also denounced the lack of international reaction - in particular by Central American States - to the abuses of the regime, and warned that the current situation in Nicaragua could be reproduced in other neighbouring countries. Against this background, they called for a unified international approach to the regime, in which the imposition of sanctions would not ruled out and where human rights criteria would have to be considered prior to any decision on financing to this country. They also referred to the difficulties that Nicaraguan migrants face when it comes to the recognition of their applications for asylum and their regularisation and integration into host societies.

The participating Members agreed on the need for the international community to keep the Nicaraguan problem as a priority in their agendas and to act in a more coordinated manner, as well as to maintain pressure and adopt sanctions against the regime as appropriate. At the same time, they called for greater unity of the political and social forces opposing the regime, and for greater coherence by establishing a limited number of basic criteria for action. The participating Members also called for the recovery of civic space, as they believe that the end of Daniel Ortega's regime will come from Nicaraguan citizens themselves. Finally, they asked the authorities of Costa Rica and other neighbouring countries to provide social services and access to employment for Nicaraguan migrants in order to promote their social inclusion and their strengthening as a community.

The inclusion of Costa Rica in the list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes

In February 2023, the EU added Costa Rica to the list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes because the country failed to its commitment to abolish or amend the harmful aspects of its foreign source income exemption regime. As a result, EU Member States may apply administrative and legislative measures to Costa Rica, such as reinforced monitoring, increased audit risks, non-deductibility of costs, controlled foreign corporation rules, withholding tax measures, and limitation of participation exemption on profit distribution. The EU updates the list twice a year, and the next one is expected in October 2023.

Costa Rica's current government criticised the previous administration's handling of the issue and stated that it is developing a comprehensive plan of action to remove its country from the blacklist by October 2023. In that sense, a draft bill has already been published in Costa Rica in order to fix the situation. However, the bill may face challenges and opposition in the

Legislative Assembly. In addition, participant Members were informed that the progress of the legislative process is still not clear and that technical dialogue with Costa Rica is ongoing.

The participating Members encouraged Costa Rica to maintain close contacts with the European Commission services to ensure that any legislation under adoption will effectively address the issues identified with the foreign source income exemption regime. They also stressed that timely enactment of the reform will be critical for EU Member States to consider Costa Rica's de-listing as soon as possible.

Conclusions

The European Union, on the one hand, and the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, on the other hand, have a strong partnership based on shared values such as human rights, social progress and the environmental protection, reflecting their like-mindedness and commitment to these important issues.

For years, the Dominican Republic has enjoyed political stability, sustained economic growth and an environment of peace, inclusion and social development, and the prospects are favourable. Effective anti-corruption measures are being taken under the current government. However, the country fears a contagion of instability from Haiti, manifested in flows of migrants that overwhelm their reception capacity and strain their social structure and their capacity to provide basic services, and that crime from Haiti may spread to the Dominican Republic. Therefore, given that the seriousness of the problem and its multidimensional nature exceed the Dominican Republic's material and financial capacities, this is calling for urgent international action in Haiti.

In its visit to Costa Rica, the Delegation Members got a comprehensive picture of this country's political, economic and social situation one year after President Rodrigo Chaves took office. Costa Rica is an upper-middle-income, democratic and stable country that has been a model of political and economic success in Central America. It has a long-standing tradition of democracy and a strong commitment to human rights. However, the security situation has deteriorated, with the highest homicide growth in the Americas between 2002 and 2022. In addition, migration from Nicaragua and from other Latin American countries has put the country's political and social system under strain. The participating Members underlined the support the EU is giving to Costa Rican migration management system through its Multi-Annual Indicative Programme. They also recognised Costa Rica's leadership on climate change and biodiversity preservation and expressed confidence that the country will stay course.

The participating Members thanked the authorities of both countries for their strong position against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, expressed in international fora, and for their willingness to contribute to the success of the EU-CELAC Summit on 17 and 18 July in Brussels and the EuroLat Assembly meeting on 24-27 July in Madrid.

Proposals for follow-up

The Dominican Republic and Costa Rica expressed great expectation on the outcomes of the EU-CELAC Summit, to be held in Brussels on 17-18 July 2023. It would be desirable that common ground be found on topics such as democracy and human rights, trade and investment,

access to finance, development, the environment, scientific and technical cooperation, digital rights and artificial intelligence and political cooperation, thus allowing both partners to put forward common positions in international fora.

The political and cooperation parts of the EU-Central America Association Agreement have been stalled for many years due to the lack of unanimous ratification in the EU. It is hoped that the ratification process will be completed soon, to allow the Agreement to be fully operational.

In March 2023, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama and Ecuador created an informal forum for dialogue and coordination called “Alliance for Development in Democracy”, with the aim of fostering economic growth in the framework of democracy, human rights and sustainable development. It is also considered as an instrument to promote common positions at regional level. It is a very interesting regional initiative that should be followed up as to its effectiveness in reaching its goals and as to whether it becomes an engine for regional integration.

Attention should be paid to the primary elections (on 1 and 29 October 2023) and then to the presidential and legislative elections (scheduled to take place on 19 May 2024) in the Dominican Republic.

The Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America would like to take this opportunity to thank the heads of the EU delegations in the Dominican Republic and in Costa Rica and their staff for their outstanding efforts before and during the European Parliament’s mission to these countries and for their support to the participants throughout the mission. This contributed to the success of the mission, and represented yet another example of the excellent work carried out by EU delegations around the world.

Annex 1: Final programme of the mission
Annex 2: List of participants

European Parliament

2019-2024



Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America

Visit to the Dominican Republic 14 May - 16 May 2023

Sunday, 14 May 2023

Europe - Santo Domingo

Afternoon Welcoming of arriving Members of the European Parliament delegation

Monday, 15 May 2022

Santo Domingo - Dajabón - Santo Domingo

06.20 - 07.30	Transfer to Dajabón
07.35 - 07.45	Transfer to the official border crossing
08.00 - 09.00	Opening of binational border with Haiti and binational market (EU financed project)
09.00 - 09.15	Transfer to CODEVI
09.30 - 11.00	Tour CODEVI (binational free trade zone and industrial park) - training facilities, nursing, school and industrial park
11.00 - 12.00	Presentation on CODEVI, facilitated by Mr. Fernando Capellán, CEO CODEVI
12.00 - 12.45	Meeting with CSO representatives
12.45 - 13.50	Free lunch
13.50 - 15.15	Transfer to Santo Domingo
15.20 - 16.00	Transfer to the Presidential Palace
16.00 - 17.00	Meeting with H.E. Mr. Luis Abinader, President of the Dominican Republic
17.00 - 17.30	Transfer to Congress
17.30 - 18.30	Meeting with H.E. Mr. Eduardo Estrella, President of the Senate, H.E. Mr. Alfredo Pacheco Osoria, President of the Chamber of Deputies, and with Members of both institutions (Directive Board, heads of the political groups and the chairs of the Foreign Affairs committees).

18.30 - 19.00 Transfer to the hotel

Tuesday, 16 May 2023

Santo Domingo

08.00 – 08.30	Transfer to the UN offices
08.30 - 10.45	Meeting with Mr. Mauricio Ramírez, UN Resident Coordinator in the Dominican Republic, and with representatives of UN agencies (IOM, ACNUR, UNICEF)
11.00 - 11.30	Transfer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
11.30 - 12.30	Meeting with Mr. Roberto Alvarez, Minister of Foreign Affairs
12.30 - 13.00	Transfer to lunch venue
13.00 - 14.45	Lunch with the business community offered by CONEP (National Business Association)
14.45 – 15.20	Transfer to the Ministry of the Environment
15.30 – 17.00	Meeting with Mr. Miguel Ceara Hatton, Minister for Environment and Natural Resources
17.00 - 17.30	Transfer to the hotel
19.00 - 19.30	Transfer to the residence of the EU Ambassador in the Dominican Republic
19.30 - 21.30	Dinner with opinion makers, CSOs and personalities

Visit to Costa Rica

17 May - 19 May 2023

Santo Domingo - San José

Wednesday, 17 May 2023

06.00 - 06.30	Transfer to Aeropuerto Internacional Las Américas (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic)
08.30	Flight departure from Aeropuerto Internacional Las Américas
09.30	Arrival in San José (Costa Rica)
10.15 - 11.00	Transfer to Congress

11.00 - 12.15	Meeting with H.E. Mr. Rodrigo Arias, President of the Legislative Assembly accompanied by Luis Fernando Mendoza (former President of <i>Internacionales PLN</i> – National Liberation Party) and Alejandro Pacheco, PUSC – Social Christian Unity Party
12.15 - 12.30	Transfer to the hotel
12.30 - 13.50	Free lunch
13.50 - 14.00	Transfer to the EU Delegation in Costa Rica
14.00 - 15.15	Meeting with Ambassador Maria Antonia Calvo Puerta, Head of the EU Delegation in Costa Rica, and resident EU Ambassadors in Costa Rica
15.30 - 17.45	Meeting with representatives of the Nicaraguan opposition
17.45 - 18.00	Transfer to the UN office
18.00 - 19.30	Meeting with representatives of UN agencies in Costa Rica
19.30 - 19.45	Transfer to the hotel

Thursday, 18 May 2023

San José

08.30 - 09.30	Meeting with representatives of civil society in the field of the environment
09.30 - 10.30	Meeting with representatives of civil society in the field of women and LGBTI+ rights
10.30 - 11.00	Transfer to the Presidential Palace
11.00 - 12.30	Meeting with Stephan Brunner, Vice-President of Costa Rica, Mr Manuel Tovar Rivera, Minister of Foreign Trade, and Mr Freddy Morera, Deputy Minister of the Presidency
12.30 - 13.00	Transfer to the restaurant
13.00 - 15.20	Working lunch with business community
15.20 - 15.30	Transfer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
15.30 - 17.00	Meeting with H.E. Mr Arnoldo André Tinoco, Minister of Foreign Affairs
17.00 - 17.45	Transfer to the hotel

08.00 - 08.45	Transfer by bus to Uruca
09.00 - 10.15	Field visit to Refugee Unit of Uruca (migration)
10.15 - 10.45	Transfer to ICAFE
10.45 - 12.45	Field visit to Instituto del Café de Costa Rica (ICAFE)
12.45 - 13.45	Transfer to the airport
14.00	Arrival to Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría, in San José Individual return flights of Members. End of mission.

Annex 2: List of participants

**MISSION OF THE DCAM DELEGATION
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND COSTA RICA
15-19 MAY 2023**

FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEPs	Group	Country/ Nationality
Tilly METZ (Chair)	Greens/EFA	Luxembourg
Javier NART	Renew Europe	Spain
Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL	EPP	Spain
Sara CERDAS	S&D	Portugal
Teuvo HAKKARAINEN	ECR	Finland
Stelios KOULOGLOU	The Left	Greece
Sabrina PIGNEDOLI	Non-attached	Italy
DCAM Secretariat		
2 staff members from the DCAM Secretariat		
Political group advisers		
3 political group advisers		
Interpreters in the Dominican Republic		
2 local interpreters		
Interpreters in Costa Rica		
2 local interpreters		