

Fifth *Conversatorio* on the Colombian Peace Talks

London, November 28, 2013

After reaching a historic agreement on political participation, the negotiating teams began the discussion of drug trafficking, the fourth item on the agenda, at the seventeenth round of negotiations. 23 people participated in the last *conversatorio* on the Colombian Peace Talks on December 16 2013. It was moderated by Andrei Gomez-Suarez (Universities of Sussex and Oxford) with the remarks by special guest Samuel Gomez (Retired Professor, University of Nariño and former member of the Unión Patriótica). The discussion touched upon issues related to political participation, drug trafficking and the current political environment.

On the issue of drug trafficking, several points were analysed:

1. The need of alternative crops for coca farmers and planning to recover the land affected by coca planting.
2. It was highlighted that throughout the discussion on drug trafficking FARC have favoured alternative solutions, such as combating those who benefit from the drug-trade rather than the growers, or the legalization of consumption, setting parameters that do not violate Colombian and international law.
3. The role of the United States and the international community is key for reaching a sustainable agreement on drug trafficking issues. Latin American leaders have opened the discussion on the failure of the war on drugs. The overwhelming American support for the peace process, shown during Santos's visit to the United States, suggest that Obama is considering a change of strategy against drug trafficking that could complement what is agreed in Havana. For its part, the FARC have proposed the involvement of multilateral organizations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to design strategies against money laundering.
4. It was noted that in several regions coca cultivation and processing is strongly linked to paramilitary groups. Several national and international organizations have consistently registered collusion between paramilitary groups and the Colombian armed forces, who at times even pressure civilian population to grow coca. Therefore, it is important to address the involvement of military forces in the regions where this problem persists.

With respect to security two important issues were discussed:

1. The relationship between the military and paramilitaries is a transversal issue in several points on the agenda of the peace process, but it does not receive much international attention. To reach a conclusive agreement, FARC has demanded the government's commitment to dismount paramilitary groups. Participants agreed that the participation of retired members of the Armed Forces for the first time in the history of peace processes in Colombia can help unmounts such linkages and welcomed the express statement to offer guarantees for the opposition in the political participation agreement.
2. The creation of a comprehensive security system (SIS) that have several components (including risk assessment, prevention of aggression and personal protection of persons at risk) was considered

as a breakthrough in the agreement on political participation. Assurances of political participation will depend on this system. However, the problems that have arisen in the implementation of the National Protection Unit for Human Rights Defenders reveal the challenges ahead and the need to learn from past lessons for the SIS to be effective.

Finally three topics were discussed regarding the current political environment:

1. A marked difference between the communication of government and the FARC is perceived. FARC constantly report on what they propose in Havana, while the government maintains more discretion. This could be related to the fact that the rounds of negotiation are the only space for FARC to act as political actors and communicate their proposals to Colombians and the world, while the government uses several spaces, such as diplomatic meetings or political events, to explain what is being negotiated.

2. Forgiveness has acquired a central symbolic role in the Colombian political process. The act of forgiveness by President Santos to the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó for the slanders made by former President Alvaro Uribe in 2005 and the request made a few days previously by Aida Avella, presidential candidate of the Unión Patriótica, that the state apologises for the genocide of the UP, are two examples.

3. The future of the negotiations will depend to some extent on the outcome of the electoral process in 2014, whose outlook is unclear. This is particularly evident in the wake of the dismissal of Mayor Gustavo Petro by the Investigator General Alejandro Ordoñez.

The foregoing has generated some scepticism about the negotiations amongst some sectors of Colombian society. Scepticism and indifference are important aspects that Colombians will have to overcome. If there is not a general effort to believe that peace can be achieved, then it will indeed be difficult to achieve. Therefore, it is important to find common ground in the context of discussions of drug trafficking, the implementation of the SIS and the political situation so as not to polarise differences amongst Colombians and to imagine a Colombia in peace.



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