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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Did Spain's Leader Accomplish in Latin America?



During his trip to Latin America last month, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez met with officials including Colombian President Iván Duque. Both men assumed office this year. // Photo: Colombian Government.

**Q** Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visited Chile, Bolivia, Colombia and Costa Rica in late August in his first tour of Latin America since taking office in June. In addition to meeting with newly inaugurated leaders in three of the four countries he visited on the tour, Sánchez vowed to support international efforts to end the political and humanitarian crises in Venezuela. What did Sánchez accomplish on his trip? What are the most important avenues for Spain-Latin America cooperation? How could Spain be more helpful in efforts to end the crisis in Venezuela, and is Sánchez, a socialist, likely to take a leading role in addressing the impasse?

**A** Anna Ayuso, senior research fellow at the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB): "The prime minister's trip had three goals: making visible to Latin America the change in Spain's executive power, pushing the interests of Spanish businesses and citizens in the region and relaunching a foreign policy based on common values, democracy and human rights. His selection of these four countries shows a willingness to find a balance between the two different political leanings in the region. There has been great pragmatism in discussing Venezuela, given that Spain's capacity to influence is limited. The prime minister has identified the OAS and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as adequate tools for conflict resolution there as well as in Nicaragua. Sánchez avoided a confrontational speech regarding Venezuela and offered mediation in Colombia, an offer that is well intentioned but not as feasible, given the stagnation of

Continued on page 2

## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## U.S. Cancels Meeting With Central American Officials

The meeting of the Alliance for Prosperity had been scheduled for this week in Washington. The group was launched in 2014 in an effort to boost economic growth and improve security in the "Northern Triangle" countries of Central America.

Page 2

### ECONOMIC

## Venezuela Eases Currency Controls

The government is allowing banks and exchange houses to sell U.S. dollars. Currency controls have required businesses and individuals to buy dollars only from the state.

Page 2

### POLITICAL

## Brazil's Bolsonaro Vows to Remain in Race Following Knife Attack

"I prepared myself for a moment like this," Jair Bolsonaro said from his hospital bed after he was stabbed.

Page 2



Bolsonaro // File Photo: Bolsonaro Campaign.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## U.S. Cancels Meeting With Central American Officials

The United States has canceled a meeting of a group that seeks to increase economic growth in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, which had been scheduled for this week in Washington, Reuters reported Saturday. In a statement, El Salvador's government said the United States had called off the meeting of the Alliance for Prosperity. The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to the wire service's request for comment. Salvadoran officials said they received notification of the cancellation on Friday and were willing to reschedule the meeting in the future. "El Salvador is ready to participate and waiting for this conference to be rescheduled," the statement said. Honduras' deputy foreign minister, José Isaías Barahona, told Reuters that the meeting was canceled because of scheduling conflicts. "Surely when schedules line up, El Salvador, along with Honduras and Guatemala, will attend the meetings of the Alliance for Prosperity," he said. The Alliance for Prosperity was launched in 2014 and aims to reduce mi-

gration from the "Northern Triangle" countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras by boosting economic growth and providing funds for security programs. Also on Friday, the State Department said it recalled diplomats to El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Panama following those countries' decisions to break ties with Taiwan in favor of establishing them with China, the Associated Press reported. The State Department recalled its ambassador to El Salvador, Jean Manes; its ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Robin Bernstein; and its chargé d'affaires in Panama, Roxanne Cabral "for consultations related to recent decisions to no longer recognize Taiwan," Reuters reported. Last month, the White House said China has been winning diplomatic ties through economic inducements that "facilitate dependence and domination, not partnership."

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Venezuela Eases Currency Controls

Venezuela's government on Friday loosened its currency controls, allowing banks and individuals to buy and sell U.S. dollars at a "single, fluctuating rate," Bloomberg News reported.

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Brazil's Bolsonaro Vows to Remain in Race Following Knife Attack

Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro vowed from his hospital bed on Friday to remain in the country's presidential race following his stabbing last week during a campaign event. "Brazil comes before anything, and God before anyone ... I'm with you Brazil," Bolsonaro said in a video. "I prepared myself for a moment like this, because you run these risks." Police have arrested 40-year-old Adelio Bispo de Oliveira in connection with the attack. Political observers say the attack could help Bolsonaro's campaign by reinforcing his message of being tough on crime, The Wall Street Journal reported.

## Colombia's ELN Will Soon Free Hostages: Duque

Colombia's National Liberation Army, or ELN, Marxist rebel group will free hostages soon, President Iván Duque said Saturday, several days after the ELN set three soldiers free after almost a month in captivity, Reuters reported. Duque has said the ELN must release all hostages before his government can restart peace talks begun last year by former President Juan Manuel Santos. The ELN is believed to be holding 16 police officers and civilians hostage.

## Chile's Anti-Trust Regulator Allowing Tianqi to Buy Stake in SQM

Chile's anti-trust regulator, FNE, said Friday it had reached a deal with Chinese miner Tianqi to allow it to buy a stake in lithium producer SQM, Reuters reported. Under the agreement, Tianqi cannot appoint one of its executives or employees to SQM's board, and it is required to notify regulators of any future, lithium-related deals between it and SQM or its main competitor, Albemarle. Chile's anti-trust court must approve the settlement by early October for the deal to move forward.

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 1

the process and the position of Colombia's new president. Sánchez wants to resume the discourse that paints Spain as a defender of Latin American interests in Europe at a delicate time given the postponement of the CELAC-E.U. Summit, which has not been held since 2015 and which next year will include Bolivia. By contrast, the 26th Inter-American Summit will be held in mid-November in Guatemala with a focus on cooperation for sustainable development. After years of a drought in Spain's funds for cooperation, Sánchez is looking to strengthen the agenda of social inclusion and environmental sustainability, two issues that are also at the center of European cooperation."

**A** **Pedro Pérez Herrero, director of the Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Estudios Latinoamericanos at the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain:** "International relations have changed in recent years because of a transformation of actors and rules. Economic globalization, migration, digitalization, inequality and corruption have generated power gaps, redefined areas of influence of nation-states and a crisis of confidence in democracy. The United States has lost economic strength. China does not stop growing. Russia is expanding its area of influence. The European Union is weakening (Brexit is a symptom of its weakness). The

Continued on page 4

The currency controls had previously required businesses and individuals to buy dollars only from the government. Finance Minister Simón Zerpa announced the changes in a televised address on Friday. The new system “will allow the Venezuelan population to buy and sell hard currency in small transactions and satisfy their personal needs,” he said. Late President Hugo Chávez established the controls in 2003 in an effort to step capital flight. The move backfired, however, as the government struggled to supply dollars, and a black market for them emerged.

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Tribunal Rules in Chevron’s Favor in Ecuador Dispute

An international tribunal on Friday ruled against Ecuador in an environmental damage case involving multinational energy corporation Chevron that dates back to 1993, the U.S. company said in a statement Friday. The permanent court of arbitration in The Hague unanimously decided that a pollution judgment by an Ecuadorean court in 2011, which ordered Chevron to pay \$9.5 billion in damages, was “procured through fraud, bribery and corruption.” U.S. lawyer Steven Donziger won the judgment in favor of indigenous villagers who blamed environmental contamination beginning from 1964 to 1992 against Texaco, which Chevron later bought, Reuters reported. In July, Donziger was suspended from practicing law in New York after a judge found he used bribery and coercion to win the ruling. The international tribunal called for the courts to dismiss the 2011 judgment and for Ecuador to pay Chevron a still undetermined amount in compensation, the company said. Pablo Fajardo, the lawyer representing villagers in the Chevron case, said he would continue to look for mechanisms for the judgment to be enforced, El Comercio reported. Courts in several other countries have ruled on the pollution case, including in Argentina and in Canada, where appeals courts also ruled in Chevron’s favor.

## IN FOCUS

### Colombian Foreign Minister Calls for Assistance in Venezuela Migration Crisis

By Anastasia Chacón González

WASHINGTON—During his first trip to Washington as Colombia’s new foreign affairs minister, Carlos Holmes Trujillo on Friday called on the United States and other international actors to step up multilateral efforts to ease the Venezuelan migration crisis, saying that Colombia alone cannot deal with the massive number of migrants leaving political and economic turmoil in their home country.

In his three-day visit, Trujillo met with the U.S. Senate’s foreign affairs committee, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan and National Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, among others. He also met with Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organization of American States, who has set up a technical group to help write a report on the migration crisis for countries in the region to coordinate their policies and implement measures to address the issue that are practical institutionally and financially.

“We cannot face such a crisis alone. We can do all the efforts that you can imagine, we can put all the resources that we may put into it, and there won’t be any possibility for Colombia to face that challenge alone,” Trujillo told an audience at the Inter-American Dialogue.

Colombian authorities have said one million Venezuelan migrants have entered Colombia in recent years, but Trujillo says the number

is likely much larger. The country is facing different types of migration, including 38,000 individuals who come in daily and then return to Venezuela the same day, thousands passing through Colombia as they move toward Ecuador and Peru and migrants who remain in Colombia. Venezuelans have settled

in 23 of Colombia’s 32 departments, according to Trujillo. Although the largest impact has been felt in border cities, 25 percent of the Venezuelan migrants in Colombia have taken up residence in Bogotá.

“We are doing all we can. We have been putting

resources, we have been strengthening our international capacity and we are going to do more,” Trujillo said. Without providing details, he said the administration of President Iván Duque will be enforcing new measures to deal with the crisis in different areas of government. At the international level, Colombia has two specific demands: the establishment of a humanitarian fund and the appointment of a U.N. special envoy to coordinate multilateral action in the region.

Trujillo’s main concern is that the problem will progressively get worse if the causes for migration are not addressed. “It is no secret for anyone that migration is due to the situation in Venezuela, to the political situation, the economic situation ... and it is very easy to imagine that the only way to change the situation ... is by change in Venezuela,” he said.



Trujillo // Photo: Irene Estefanía González, Inter-American Dialogue.

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 2

Islamic State has reconfigured relations in the Middle East. Latin America—given the economic crises of the European economies and the protectionist bet of the United States—has now turned toward Asian countries. Africa—the forgotten place for policies of development—does not stop sending migrants to Europe. In 2018, Europe, the United States, Latin America and Africa must understand that their future lies in promoting the most integrated Atlantic world. It is not a matter of debating whether Latin America is still the West or of counting the number of people who speak one language or another. The 21st century has brought about the challenge of building a plural world that recognizes diversity and preserves the dignity of people beyond borders, without renouncing national identities. The economy is important, but politics matters a lot. The state, nation and market must find a new balance. One cannot continue thinking about the relations of Spain with Latin American countries from a hierarchical, economic logic or from exclusive political friendships. The state visit of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to Latin America must be understood as part of a long-term strategic plan of Spanish, and by extension European, foreign policy. The road is difficult, but that does not mean one has to stop trying to undertake it.”

**A** **Joaquín Roy, director of the European Union Center at the University of Miami:** “The Spanish premier’s tour of four Latin American countries in five days revealed that Spain is back in the region, from where it actually never disappeared. Spain is a welcome actor there. The trip confirmed once more the importance of the region for Spain, rather sidelined by Sánchez’s predecessor Mariano Rajoy, who was more inclined to pragmatic economic and trade deals. Sánchez’s tour avoided the most important

Latin American actors (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) for a variety of reasons. The Spanish prime minister will have the chance to visit Buenos Aires during the G20 meeting. At the same time, he avoided landing there during one of the country’s most dangerous economic stages. Brazil is facing uncertain

“**The trip confirmed once more the importance of the region for Spain, rather sidelined by Sánchez’s predecessor Mariano Rajoy..”**

— Joaquín Roy

times because of the presidential race. Mexico has just elected a new president, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador will not take office until December. Sánchez chose the priorities of investments in Bolivia, trade in Chile, support for the peace process in Colombia and reinforcement for democracy in Costa Rica, in the vicinity of Nicaragua, a hotspot to be avoided directly. Venezuela was in the background but at a distance, and direct references were reduced to criticism about the existence of political prisoners. Sánchez, as a social democrat, would avoid direct entanglement with Caracas, led by the explosive and unstable Maduro, and instead leave that role to others, such as one of his predecessors in Madrid, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The Spanish governments since José María Aznar have accepted the lesson that the best policy is not to make any moves that would worsen the situation.”

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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