

COLOMBIA: FROM PEACE PROCESS TO BUILDING A COUNTRY

Hubert Gehring / Margarita Cuervo

"Why", asked the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, "is the originality that is readily granted us in literature so mistrustfully denied us in our difficult attempts at social change?" Even 20 years on from his acceptance speech on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, when he posed this question, Colombia is a country of great paradoxes and contradictions, which is still awaiting the social and political changes that are urgently required. When viewed from a positive perspective, it is an up-and-coming power in the international arena and one of the best investment locations in the world. At the same time, it is the country with the greatest inequalities in the region. The 1991 constitution is considered one of the best legal frameworks in the world. However, over 90 per cent of crime still escapes jurisdiction. The country has entered into various strategic alliances and contracts to intensify its integration into international commerce. However, it is notoriously difficult for people to make use of these opportunities due to considerable deficiencies in the infrastructure. Transporting a container from the capital to Cartagena costs three times the amount required to ship it from this Caribbean port to Shanghai.

Contrary to popular belief, three quarters of its municipalities, which constitute 94 per cent of its surface area in which 32 per cent of Colombians reside, are predominantly rural in character.¹ In rural areas, poverty and inequality are particularly pronounced. An agricultural labourer earns an average of eight euros a day – food not included – and



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1 | "Colombia rural. Razones para la esperanza", Informe Nacional de desarrollo Humano 2011 (National Human Development Report 2011), Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD) (United Nations Development Programme), 19.10.2011.

is covered neither by social insurance nor a pension entitlement. At a regional level, the contrasts are even clearer. Ten major cities benefit from economic growth and act as drivers of the country's development. In 70 per cent of Colombian municipalities, however, the poverty rate is 66 per cent.

"Colombia is Magic Realism" is the new slogan of the international campaign of a government agency for the promotion of tourism, investment activity and exports, which is meant to call attention to the country's cultural attractions and enticing landscape. But it is precisely in this landscape that state security forces and various guerrilla groups have been battling against each other for 50 years. While these hostilities are continuing, the Colombian government is conducting peace negotiations with the commanders of one guerrilla group in Havana, a situation that is reminiscent of "Macondo", the imaginary place from Gabriel García Márquez's novel. It is only possible for these contradictions to exist because there is not one Colombia but many, which co-exist in parallel worlds.

The country's fragmentation and particularly the lack of efficient state action at national, regional and local level are at the root of the armed conflict (among other reasons). The violent confrontation with its various actors and nuances reflects diverse conflicts resulting, among other things, from the inability to provide political answers to questions relating to social and regional

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discrimination. This is why neither an exclusively military option nor a peace agreement negotiated with the illegal organisations, which is rumoured to contain numerous declarations of intent, will provide a conclusive solution to the structural problems that are afflicting the country and fuelling this conflict. The armed conflict is merely one of many symptoms of a serious deficiency of governability in Colombia, which dates back to the colonial era and has not been resolved to date. The answers and approaches to finding a solution will only have an effect if one fundamental question is addressed: gradual decentralisation, combined with a strengthening of the state and genuine inclusion of the regions in the country's governmental system.

Consequently, the conclusion of a peace agreement in Havana may represent a necessary and possibly the easiest step along a long and difficult road, which will call for structural and fundamental changes if it is to culminate in an enduring peace. All Colombians will have to join together in an effort to find solutions for building their country. There is a need for creative and specific solutions that will measure up to the country of magic realism.

THE ARMED CONFLICT – ALSO A SYMPTOM OF DEEPER PROBLEMS AFFECTING COLOMBIA

There are a number of different factors that can be identified as the causes of the armed conflict in Colombia. That said, there is one constant in the country's history that various experts consider the underlying cause of the armed conflict: a system of indirect government, in which the central power cedes governmental power to local elites in peripheral areas.² The failure of the state to establish a truly balanced and efficient democratic system of government involving the central government and the regions has produced two phenomena, which are correlated and reinforce one another.

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On the one hand, it is the regional elites who hold the true power – while not necessarily being members of the local or departmental governments – and not the central government. This widens the gulf between the center and the periphery and hinders the execution of state authority.³ In this scenario, the elites – local and national, liberal and conservative – divide the political and economic powers among themselves in a manner that secures their hold on power. On the other hand, the armed illegal actors have made violence a common tool to further their agenda. It is a means to hinder or prevent social change; it also serves to enforce or maintain power in a certain area; and finally,

2 | James Robinson, "Colombia: Another 100 Years of Solitude?", *Current History*, Feb 2013, http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jrobinson/files/robinson-current_history.pdf (accessed 13 Feb 2014).

3 | Gustavo Duncan, "Una visión alternativa del conflicto colombiano", *Razón Pública*, 9 Mar 2009, <http://razonpublica.com/index.php/conflicto-drogas-y-paz-temas-30/368-una-visialternativa-del-conflicto-colombiano.html> (accessed 13 Feb 2014).

it helps to repel the supremacy of the state or to neutralise it.⁴ A brief look at the development of the armed conflict in Colombia shows the historic link with unresolved issues of land and power distribution, which have existed since colonial times.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURE AND THE PHENOMENON OF THE POWER OF REGIONAL ELITES

During the colonial era, allocation of land was realised by means of various types of private property acquisition. Exercising a form of indirect government, the Crown granted Spanish settlers land and gave them power over the indigenous population and slaves. Ever since, two aspects have been resurfacing in Colombia's history: precarious administrative conditions and a deficient state system on the one hand and the use of violence as a means of acquiring and utilising land on the other.⁵

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Added to this are two further developments: The first was the population growth due to the immigration of people from Spain and Africa. The search for new land to occupy resulted in the establishment of small agricultural businesses at the periphery of the highlands and the Andes in the south and east of the country. The second was the proliferation of haciendas on the Caribbean Coast and in the Andes Valleys through land grabbing and the development of extensive cattle breeding.

The hacienda system explains the correlation between political power and economic power linked to landownership and thereby power over land and people. This intimate relationship between landownership and political power has produced the figure of the big landowner, referred to as *gamonal* or *señor*, and forms the framework for the distribution of political power in the regions. This structure, which developed from the 19th century and has been a constant in Colombian history ever since, represents the key to understanding the state's lack of power in the

4 | Alejandro Reyes, "Guerreros y campesinos, el despojo en la tierra en Colombia", *Editorial Norma*, 2009.

5 | Alejandro Reyes, "La violencia y el problema agrario en Colombia", *Revista Análisis Político*, 2004.

regions. The relationship of servitude produced “split” loyalties throughout the country and created a type of feudal society. In this system, the landowner provides his workers with food and security – in return for their services as well as their political allegiance and their support in war.

In many places, the wars of independence fought against the Spanish motherland were led by the big landowners, and in the civil wars of the 19th century, the haciendas were at the core of the conflict between local elites and the central power.⁶ It was also precisely during this era that the state transferred landownership to deserving military figures. Violence had thereby become a means of land acquisition and encouraged the concentration of landownership. At the same time, this phenomenon produced tensions, which escalated into violent conflicts because of the instances of exclusion intrinsic to them.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY: LAND DISTRIBUTION BATTLES AND SOCIAL ISSUES

As the country entered into a process of modernisation based on industrial development, the hacienda system began to change in the first decades of the 20th century and to follow a course of greater development and productivity. Simultaneously, a number of events inside the country and abroad had an impact on the agricultural conflicts of that time. Initially, booming coffee exports caused foreign exchange earnings to multiply and became the most important basis for a countrywide proliferation and consolidation of capitalism.⁷

The growth centers were pervaded by an atmosphere of modernisation, which resulted in accelerated change. This upsurge of industry and commerce entailed a high demand for labour the urban population could not satisfy. Consequently, there was a rural exodus as workers could earn more in the city than in the country.⁸

6 | Ibid.

7 | Jesús A. Bejarano, “El despegue cafetero”, in: José Antonio Ocampo (ed.), *Historia Económica de Colombia*, Editorial Planeta, Fedesarrollo, 2007.

8 | Ibid.



Granted land to peasants who farmed it, but did not own it: President Alfonso López Pumarejo governed Columbia from 1934 till 1938. | Source: Banrep Cultural, flickr ©¹.

The development of a capitalist economy was one factor in the legitimisation crisis of the hacienda system, which came under strong pressure – not least from the global economic crisis of 1929. The old-established hacienda owners began to lose their grip on their economic and political leadership role; that migrated to a large extent to the sections of the economy involved in the coffee business. In the course of these changes, there were protests, strikes and land occupations by peasants and indigenous people. Their demands were as follows: a right to land ownership, better working conditions, and a right to grow export products and share in the economic upturn. At a local level, the government responded to the unrest with repression in some instances. At a national level, however, President Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934 to 1938) came to power with a progressive campaign entitled “Revolution in Progress”, which sought answers to the social questions of the times.⁹

9 | Álvaro Albán, “Reforma y contrarreforma agraria en Colombia”, *Revista de Economía Institucional*, No. 24, Vol. 13, 2011.

In 1936, Law No. 200 was passed, which, among other things, envisaged the granting of land to peasants who farmed land that did not belong to them, in line with the principle that private property entailed a social function. López Pumarejo thereby found an answer to the peasants' demand for landownership; but he did not change the social structures, which continued to be characterised by inequality regarding land distribution.¹⁰ During Pumarejo's second term in office (1942 to 1945), opponents of Law No. 200 – including both elites and landowners – succeeded in having a new law passed which restored some of the former conditions. It prevented peasants from becoming owners of the land they farmed, for instance. Due to opposition from the national and local elites, the first opportunity to realise an essential structural change towards greater social participation and equality was thereby squandered.

LA VIOLENCIA AND THE NATIONAL FRONT IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY

After the failure of this first agricultural reform, the state did not respond to the social disaffection in certain areas for years. The subsequent, violent period of Colombian history began with the assassination of

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political radical Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. As a dissident from the ranks of the Liberal Party, Gaitán aimed for major changes in Colombia's political, social and economic system. His assassination in Bogotá led to a number of public protests and riots that became known as "El Bogotazo". Even before that time, parallel the social protests, a phase referred to as *La Violencia* (Violence) had been impending, which was to last at least a decade. It was characterised by serious confrontation between the two traditional political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. It would ultimately cost 200,000 people their lives. There was unrest and persecution, resulting in over a million peasants being driven from their homes.

10 | Absalón Machado Cartagena, "Reforma agraria: una ilusión que resultó un fracaso", *Revista Credencial Historia*, No. 119, Nov 1999.

Various historians have described how the battle between Liberals and Conservatives was utilised by armed groups to take possession of vast swathes of land.¹¹ The expulsion of the rural population and the land grabbing increased the concentration of landownership.¹² In addition, (liberal and communist) guerrilla fighters fled into remote areas of the country during this period, where there was no military presence. They would subsequently go on to found the FARC.



Memorial at the site of crime: The assassination of political radical Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 in Bogotá marked the beginning of a violent period of Colombian history. | Source: momentcaptured1, flickr ©.

In 1953, the political leadership made efforts to put an end to the violence by establishing a military regime under General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. However, pressure from some sections of the economy, which feared the dictatorial repression would damage their interests, as well as from political circles excluded from the government resulted in the general stepping down in 1957. Then came the period of the National Front (Frente Nacional) from 1958 to 1974, during which the elites of the two large parties agreed to share power in order to protect the old patrimonial system and the profits from international trade, relying on support from the emerging middle classes and the established big landowners.

11 | Reyes, n. 5.

12 | Absalón Machado Cartagena, "Tenencia de tierras, problema agrario y conflicto", in: *Desplazamiento forzado: dinámicas de guerra, exclusión y desarraigo*, ACNUR, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004.

The National Front did not strive for any far-reaching changes beyond consolidation of the two-party system and subordination of the military, but aimed at restoring political control of society to the traditional elites. This did not prove adequate for addressing the social problems. Telling proof of this is the fact that the period during which Conservatives and Liberals alternated in power and shared it equally saw the emergence of various guerrilla groups and the phenomenon of the self-defence organisations – which would subsequently develop into paramilitary associations – as well as the development of the drug trade in the country.

The only major attempt to realise structural change towards greater equity came in the term of Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958 to 1962), but failed due to the central government's inability to motivate the local elites to cooperate.¹³ One of the provisions of Law

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No. 135 of 1961 envisaged the purchase of land by the state and its distribution among the peasants. During the term of Conservative President Misael Pastrana (1970 to 1974), however, a counter-reform of sorts took place at the instigation of the big landowners, which resulted in an arrangement under which the expropriation of land was not carried out if it was considered to be "well managed".

Consequently, the conflicts between the peasants and the big landowners as well as the increasing inequality in urban and rural areas continued into the second half of the 20th century. Parallel to this and with new ideologies emerging in Latin America in the 1960s, the political system curtailed the possibilities of engaging in political activities for certain actors – including those of the Left. It was to a large part this context in conjunction with the fatal lack of a state presence in some areas of the country that encouraged the emergence of the guerrilla movements.¹⁴

13 | Absalón Machado Cartagena, "La reforma agraria en la Alianza para el Progreso". Article in *Seminario Internacional 50 Años de la Alianza para el Progreso en Colombia: Lecciones para el presente*, 2011, <http://ceecolombia.org/print.php?id=2807> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

14 | Cf. Reyes, n. 4.

GUERRILLAS, PARAMILITARIES AND THE DRUG TRADE: COEXISTING PARALLEL STATES?

There is ample literature on the history and development of the guerrilla movements that emerged in the second half of the 20th century as an expression of resistance by peasants and labourers as well as of a revolutionary battle to take over state power. This also applies to the paramilitary associations which emerged as “self-defence” organisations against the guerrillas, as well as to the organisations of drug dealers towards the end of the 20th century.¹⁵ There

During the course of the 1960s, guerrilla groups with a leftist ideology emerged: first the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, then the National Liberation Army and the Popular Liberation Army.

were two decisive factors: the existence of illegal organisations as “para-governmental” actors, who took over the role of providing social order in areas where the state did not have a sufficient presence, and their coexistence and interrelations with the political elites at local level. During the course of the 1960s, guerrilla groups with a leftist ideology emerged: first the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC, 1964), then the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN, 1965) and the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL, 1967).

From the late 1950s, armed groups of peasants, who had fled due to violent clashes between the parties, began to organise in remote areas of the country. A stronger civil presence of the state was called for. The government referred to these areas as “independent republics”, thereby giving the impression that there was a separatist agenda involved. In one case, the army conducted a military operation to quell an impending uprising. Not only did they fail to destroy the structure of this peasant army, it also established the FARC’s strongest foundation myth: the survivors fled, crossed the mountains and reformed in the lowlands of eastern Colombia.¹⁶ Although the 1980s and 1990s saw the disarming and reintegration of some of these groups, the FARC and the ELN are still in existence five decades after they were founded. Two other phenomena

15 | Fernán E. González, Ingrid J. Bolívar and Teófilo Vásquez, *Violencia política en Colombia. De la nación fragmentada a la construcción del Estado*, Bogotá, Cinep, 2003.

16 | Cf. Reyes, n. 4.

are exacerbating the problem further: the drug trade and paramilitary organisations.

In the mid-1970s, the first coca plantations to supply the drug trade appeared in Colombia. It was in that decade that the drug dealer gangs, who would later be known as the Cali Cartel – headed by Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela – and the Medellín Cartel headed by Pablo Escobar appeared. During the 1980s, coca cultivation grew as much as eight-fold and the production of cocaine tripled.¹⁷ In this period, both cartels consolidated, without stopping to fight each other.

These two organisations also permeated Colombian politics, economy and society. In the early 1990s, the drug trade had consolidated and the drug barons controlled the production, processing and marketing. But in addition, they succeeded in controlling and directing broad sectors of political activities at local and national level. One notorious case was the so-called Process 8,000, in the course of which President Ernesto Samper (1994 to 1998) was accused of having received money from the drug trade for his presidential election campaign. With the support of the USA in its “War on Drugs”, the Colombian government took up the fight against the cartels. In 1993, during an operation conducted by the Colombian police, Escobar died in Medellín while trying to escape. In 1995, Rodríguez Orejuela was captured together with other leading figures of the Cali Cartel and extradited to the USA.¹⁸

With the death and, respectively, the extradition of the drug bosses, the large drug cartels in Colombia disbanded. However, the business soon restructured. Other cartel members as well as paramilitary groups that were being established took over from the bosses and formed smaller units, which transferred from the city to the countryside. Furthermore, the guerrillas became involved in the business from as early as 1987 to finance their war. The drug

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17 | 75 per cent of the cocaine that reached the USA originated in Colombia and produced revenues equivalent to three billion euros for the drug dealers.

18 | Bruce Bagley, “Narcotráfico, violencia política y política exterior de Estados Unidos hacia Colombia en los noventa”, *Revista Colombia Internacional*, No. 49-50, 2000.

trade thereby became a catalyst for conflict in Colombia. It is the most important funding source of the armed groups, and the groups also compete for control of the growing areas and trading channels. The paramilitary units underwent a similar process; they initially had support from the army, from landowners and even from peasants, who were fighting the guerrillas, and in turn the guerrillas then also attacked those peasants. This phenomenon began in different regions and culminated in the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC), an organisation that was deeply embroiled in the drug trade.¹⁹

And as others took over the management of the drug trade after the bosses' demise, something similar would happen following the demobilisation of the paramilitary groups (under the Uribe government): the reformation of disbanded groups in the form of different illegal organi-

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sations, subsequently referred to as "criminal gangs". In reference to the difficulty of solving the problem of the drug trade, expert Gustavo Duncan remarked: "The state cannot make agreements with the drug dealers,

which would cause the business to disappear because other heads would replace them."²⁰ Furthermore, although the heads of the drug dealer rings, guerrilla and paramilitary groups are considered mafiosi and criminals by central government, they are regarded as the state in the regions. It is they who regulate social order, everyday life, the payment of dues; they make the rules, build schools and realise infrastructure projects. The obligations of subservience towards the local elites extend to these illegal actors as well, who, after all, offer protection and the basis for people's livelihood: namely coca.

Ultimately, the reason for the existence of these "parallel states"²¹ is the fact that the idea of the "señores" as owners of political and economic power still persists in the regions, in spite of the country having undergone great change. In

19 | Gustavo Duncan, *Los Señores de la Guerra*, Editorial Planeta, 2006.

20 | Duncan, n. 3.

21 | Carlo Nasi, "Instituciones políticas para el post-conflicto", in: *Construcción de paz en Colombia*, Angelika Rettberg (ed.), Ediciones Uniandes, 2012, 74.

2011, a Colombian journalist interviewed “Enrique”, southern commander-in-chief of the AUC in Putumayo, where the largest volume of coca in the world was being grown at that time. The journalist reported how, when he had just arrived at the hotel, he gave the receptionist a telephone number and requested to be connected to the Comandante. The receptionist replied: “Everybody around here knows this telephone number. If there is an emergency, that’s the number to call.”²²

For this reason some authors²³ speak of “señores de la guerra”, i.e. warlords, as the concept by which the illegal armed groups operate, survive and replace one another. They represent the de facto powers in the areas they control militarily and politically and where the population shows loyalty to them rather than the state. Many of these “señores” have succeeded in corrupting and infiltrating state institutions, as their criminal activities do not appear to represent a direct threat to state authority.²⁴ Only when the national elite perceives them as a threat, does the central power take steps to combat them. This “warlord” concept also provides an explanation for the Process 8,000 in the 1990s and explains the current indications for close links between regional politicians and illegal armed groups: “parapolitics”, “FARC politics” and most recently “BACRIM politics”.²⁵

Only when the national elite perceives the warlords as a threat, does the central power take steps to combat them.

22 | Álvaro Sierra, “Los señores de la guerra”, *El Tiempo*, 23 Sep 2001, <http://eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-658571> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

23 | Duncan, n. 19; Salomón Kalmanovitz, “La república de los señores de la guerra”, *El Espectador*, 7 Apr 2013, <http://elespectador.com/opinion/columna-414577-republica-de-los-senores-de-guerra> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

24 | Gustavo Duncan, “El enigma de Víctor Carranza”, *Razón Pública*, 15 Apr 2013, <http://razonpublica.com/index.php/politica-y-gobierno-temas-27/3674-el-enigma-de-victor-carranza-.html> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

25 | *Parapolítica* is a term that was coined by public opinion for the 2006 scandal, where the strong links between the paramilitaries – already disarmed at that point – and political representatives, particularly the local elites, were exposed. There has also been talk of similar dealings with the FARC, although this was not investigated, and of some links existing already between local politicians and criminal gangs (*bandas criminales*, BACRIM), which came into existence after the AUC was disbanded.



Demonstration against FARC in Madrid: On 2 February 2008 thousands of people gathered in different places around the world to protest against the leftist Colombian guerilla. | Source: Camilo Rueda López, flickr ©①③.

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN EL CAGUÁN AND THE COLOMBIA PLAN: CARROT AND STICK

In the mid-1990s, two thirds of the global cocaine supply came from Colombia, and by the end of the decade the growing area had increased by 57 per cent. The FARC held considerable power and proceeded from guerrilla warfare to open war. In addition, the AUC had consolidated on Colombian territory. It was against this backdrop that the presidency of Andrés Pastrana began (1998 to 2002). He had already proposed to conduct peace talks with the guerrillas during his election campaign and included a project in his government program that would subsequently be referred to as the "Plan Colombia": a program to end the armed conflict and eradicate the drug trade.

The period under the Pastrana government saw the beginning of the ultimately failed peace process of El Caguán²⁶ involving the FARC, which brought considerable benefits for the guerrilla group. This process produced several lessons for future negotiations with the guerrillas. Many

26 | This is the term by which the negotiations with FARC under the Pastrana government became known; they were held in the town of San Vicente del Caguán in Caquetá Department in eastern Colombia.

experts therefore considered Pastrana's decision to make a demilitarised zone available to the FARC as a negotiation venue a strategic mistake. The FARC took control of the zone and its population, and the coca plantations and illegal trade proliferated considerably. Another criticism was that the President wanted to include too many topics and partners in the negotiations. This had the effect that the talks did not have a clear agenda and were not limited in time or subject matter, which is why they did not proceed very efficiently and ultimately failed.

That said, Pastrana, with the support from the U.S. government, was one of the fathers of the so-called Plan Colombia. Under Pastrana, the Colombian armed forces were modernised and strengthened. This meant that the illegal groups could be combatted much more effectively. But ultimately this was not sufficient to end the armed conflict. In spite of the five billion euros the USA has invested in this endeavour – and the Colombian contribution which amounted to twice that – it has not been possible to resolve the issue sustainably; although the FARC has been weakened militarily, the “War on Drugs” has so far not been very effective because of the failure to get to the root of the problem and strengthen the civil presence of the state in the regions.²⁷

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FROM FIRM HAND TO DOVE OF PEACE: STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS PERSIST

The governments of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002 to 2006 and 2006 to 2010) and the actions of Juan Manuel Santos (2010 to 2014) in his role of president to date have yielded significant progress in terms of security, strengthening of state institutions and macroeconomic figures. In spite of this, the structural problems persist. Even worse, Colombia might not gain peace in the short or medium term either through the “firm hand” policy conducted by Uribe – the military option – or by negotiations – Santos’ way of the “dove of peace”.

27 | Alejandro Gaviria and Daniel Mejía, “Políticas antidroga en Colombia: éxitos, fracasos y extravíos”, Ediciones Uniandes, 2012.

In other words: even if the Colombian army succeeded in eradicating all illegal armed groups, new ones would take their place. And if it were possible, on the other hand, to negotiate a genuine peace agreement with the FARC and maybe the ELN, that would not necessarily mean an end to the armed conflict either. The restoration of public order and security as well as the negotiations within the framework of the peace process are both necessary, yet ultimately not sufficient, to resolve the conflict. There have been no efforts made so far to address the structural problems, and that is the task that needs to be completed to avoid Colombia suffering armed confrontation and an even greater weakening of the state for many decades to come.



Negotiating with the FARC rebels in Havana: President Juan Manuel Santos, here visiting a school in Suba in September 2013. | Source: Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones de Colombia ©①.

URIBE AND SECURING DEMOCRACY: FIRM HAND, BIG HEART

As a presidential candidate, Uribe voiced the widespread resentment against peace negotiations with the FARC and against the deterioration of the security situation in the country after the failure of El Caguán. His idea about the way to secure democracy can be condensed into one sentence: once we have restored security, the country

will progress. He was convinced that security would boost investor confidence, and that the subsequent economic growth would bring more jobs, better healthcare and education systems as well as opportunities for all.

His motto “Firm hand, big heart” was a clear and unequivocal message. The government would fight the terrorists, but it would also be magnanimous and conciliatory towards those who laid down their arms and returned to legality. Uribe was elected President of

Colombia for the first time in 2002 and proceeded to implement his “Democratic Security” project. He increased the defence budget consistently and strengthened the police presence in all communities of the country. In addition, and thanks to the modernisation of the armed forces initiated under Pastrana, he was able to take intensive military action against the FARC and the ELN, which undoubtedly weakened these groups.

Uribe was elected President for the first time in 2002 and proceeded to implement his “Democratic Security” project. He increased the defence budget consistently and strengthened the police presence.

Parallel to his strategy of offensive action against the guerrilla groups, he also negotiated a collective demobilisation campaign with the AUC paramilitary self-defence groups and their submission to the justice system. This produced the most extensive demobilisation to date in sections of the illegal armed groups. According to the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración, ACR), 54,317 fighters laid down their arms between 2002 and 2010. Over 32,000 of them did so in the course of the peace negotiations with the AUC; the remainder were individual deserters from the ranks of the FARC and the ELN.²⁸ Those concerned could subsequently take part in measures for reintegration into civil society as soon as their legal situation had been clarified. Many relapsed, however, or even worse: there were mid-ranking members of the AUC who reformed and established new gangs of criminals and drug dealers.

Despite the progress made under Uribe and the continuing prominence given to his plan for “Democratic Security”, one step along the way was missing, namely efforts to enforce changes that would address the problems at their root.

28 | Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración,
<http://www.reintegracion.gov.co> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

This may be down to the fact that the prevailing opinion is that all the country's problems are due to the armed conflict and more specifically to the existence of illegal armed groups. Consequently, people have the expectation that the day when the last criminal organisation is squelched and its members returned to legality the country's problems will be resolved. The strength of the message lies in its simplicity; but the political measures relying on it do not take into account the structural aspects that should be considered.

UNDER SANTOS: NEGOTIATIONS IN HAVANA, FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT REFORMS, AND CONTINUING ARMED CONFLICT

After his second term in office, Uribe was succeeded by his Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos. His government program basically envisaged a continuation of Uribe's course of securing democracy, complemented by an ambitious agenda of political measures and reforms aimed at raising the level of prosperity in the country.

Good Intentions, Hesitant Implementation

Although the results of the implementation and impact of the laws are outstanding, several of these projects are already producing some achievements.

To this end, the government had drawn up a number of bills based on the need for stronger social and regional participation and intended to increase prosperity in Colombia through "engines" of development. Although the results of the implementation and impact of the laws are outstanding, several of these projects (law regulating matters relating to the victims of the internal armed conflict and restoration of landownership; a legal framework for peace; law of first employment) are already producing some achievements. Others were modified on their way through Parliament and are heading in a different direction from what was originally envisaged (reform of the system of "regalías"; tax reform). And some simply did not make it through, as Parliament denied its approval, above all due to strong resistance against far-reaching changes to further the country's development. The affected areas include education, the healthcare system, the legal system and the general law on land use.

It is important to mention that two laws, which had originally aimed at achieving greater social justice, have failed to fulfil their purpose. According to the 2012 tax reform, income tax was supposed to increase proportionally with pay, but this provision does not apply to the taxation of the dividends received by the employers, in whose hands most of the country's capital is concentrated. Another reform dating from 2012 regulates the access of departments and municipalities to the revenues from natural resources, whether they are extracted in their region or not. However, this is where you see major challenges to local development and regional integration, as the reform has so far hardly been implemented at all due to the incapability of the local authorities to take effective action. On the one hand, this illustrates the reluctance on the part of the elites to implement structural change and to finance it (for example tax reform and tax payments by the Colombian population) and, on the other hand, the inability of the central power to enforce the changes conceived in Bogotá in the regions. To quote an observer of regional politics: "They can pass as many laws in Bogotá as they want. It doesn't affect us here; we do what we want." Or as people in some of Colombia's regions like to say: "This law hasn't made its way here so far, and it probably never will."

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Negotiations in Havana: Progress and Problems

One of Santos' main goals is peace in Colombia. He demonstrated that by initiating peace talks with the FARC, which he announced in August 2012. It also appears that a door is opening for dialogue with the ELN. The process has, however, not gone entirely smoothly, and in a potential post-conflict scenario, the country's structural problems – many of which appear in the negotiating agenda with the FARC – must be dealt with at the root.

Once the Santos government had agreed to hold exploratory talks with the FARC in August 2012, it lost no time in setting an ultimate deadline by which an agreement was to be reached: November 2013. This deadline was not kept, although the government continues to insist on coming to a speedy agreement. This intention was confirmed by a joint statement of the government and the FARC, which

included a roadmap for the dialogue with the guerrilla force. According to the principle “nothing is decided until everything is decided”, it mentions five points to be negotiated at Havana to achieve an “end to the armed conflict”, in other words to end the armed confrontation and begin constructing sustainable peace. The negotiations are to cover the following points:

1. Rural development,
2. Political participation,
3. Ending the conflict (demobilisation and reintegration of the former fighters)
4. Resolution of the problem of illegal drugs and
5. Victims.

By January 2014, the government and the FARC had only succeeded in making progress on rural development and political participation. The subject currently under discussion is the drug trade.

The time factor was a considerable problem at these talks from the onset. By January 2014, the government and the FARC had only succeeded in making progress on the first two points of the agenda: rural development and political participation. The subject currently under discussion is the drug trade. There is a further problem in that presidential and parliamentary elections are coming up while the negotiations are going on. It was for that reason that Santos had already asked the parties making up the governing coalition whether the negotiations should be suspended, broken off altogether or continued as before for the duration of the election campaign. Although public opinion is divided on this point, Santos knows his entire political capital is at stake in these negotiations. In November 2013, Santos announced his presidential candidacy and decided to continue the negotiations in Havana. This was considered to be problematic. The fear is that the President will make too many concessions to the guerrillas to gain an advantage for his own campaign while the FARC seems to be under no time pressure whatsoever.

There are people opposed to this course of action in all camps. Particularly former President Uribe and some of the landowners from the coffee growing and cattle breeding sectors have voiced their opposition to the way in which the negotiations are being conducted. And there are also indications from within the FARC that the organisation is split. There are sections among the guerrillas – those who

gain the greatest financial benefit from the drug trade – who are not party to the truce the FARC called unilaterally at the end of 2012. Although the great majority of Colombians want peace, 63 respondents in a survey conducted by the polling institute DATEXCO stated they do not agree with the way President Santos is conducting the negotiations. Only 27 believe a peace agreement will be signed, and only 21 per cent believe the FARC is seriously interested in such an agreement.

The Armed Conflict Continues

Subsequently, the armed conflict in Colombia continues parallel to the events in Havana. So far, key subjects such as the drug trade and the issues of victims have not yet been discussed. However, the talks are no doubt an essential prerequisite to prepare the ground for the real peace process, which is already frequently referred to as “post-conflict”.

There have also been a number of instances of social mobilisation and tensions during 2013 indicating that the armed conflict is not the only problem in Colombia. During the first quarter, there were demonstrations and demands expressed to the government from the agricultural sector, which has been affected by the negative impact of the free trade agreement that recently came into force. Some sectors of Colombian agriculture are simply not (yet) competitive. Due to the belated and not entirely satisfactory response by central government to the various concerns raised, the protests spread to other regions and sectors of industry. The situation culminated in a large-scale countrywide strike being called for on 19 August, which was no longer restricted to the rural population and lasted 21 days.

Although the roots of these problems go back to the time before Santos took office, they have become even more obvious since then. The fact that the President and his cabinet have failed to answer many of the strikers’ questions has led to increasing resistance and outrage on the part of those affected. The demonstrators’ demands are as follows: improvement of the socio-economic conditions, stronger inclusion in the country’s development and, above

all, the presence of the state. One local newspaper published a report entitled "The Country of the Forgotten" and quoted farmers who were blocking the country's transport routes to make sure their demands were heard: "The state has forgotten us. We find ourselves totally abandoned."

VARIOUS PROBLEMS IN DIVERSE REGIONS

Besides the inability of the state to exercise its power efficiently at the different governmental levels, the problems afflicting Colombia manifest mainly in the regions. Even if an agreement were to be reached in Havana, the individual points of the negotiating agenda would still have to be implemented in each region. Without adequate land regulation, without a system of power sharing and coordinated administration between central government and local administrative units based on an efficient normative framework, which is also applied in practice, and without genuine involvement of all regions and social sectors in the country's development, sustainable peace will not be possible.

Deficits of Social and Regional Inclusion in Colombia

With gross domestic product rising at over four per cent over the last three years, Colombia is one of the five largest economies in South America.

The Colombian economy has grown substantially over the last few years. Investments have risen, unemployment has fallen, and there has also been a noticeable and significant reduction in poverty. With gross domestic product rising at over four per cent over the last three years, oil production exceeding one million barrels a day and record figures for foreign direct investments, Colombia is one of the five largest economies in South America. However, when one examines these indicators from a regional and local perspective, it is noticeable that the fruits of this development do not benefit the whole of society, at least not equitably.

First of all, Colombia is still one of the most unequal countries in the world and in Latin America.²⁹ Furthermore, it still has a high concentration of landownership, which

29 | According to the Colombian Office of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística de Colombia, DANE) the country's Gini index is 0.54.

has even increased over the last decade.³⁰ According to a recent UN Habitat report, Colombia is the country with the greatest level of inequality in urban areas within Latin America.³¹ Amongst other things, the study shows that economic growth in particular does not automatically result in a decrease in inequality. In fact, Medellín – Colombia's economic capital, where many important Colombian and foreign companies are based – is the city with the strongest imbalance. Although the different governments have reduced poverty overall, inequality has remained.

Colombia also has major deficits in the education system. Although 90 per cent of school-age children attend primary or secondary school in the capital Bogotá, there are serious problems in the pre-school sector (50 per cent) and with institutions of higher education. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that 80 per cent of the members of more prosperous classes have a university qualification, while this is only the case for 20 per cent of those who come from poorer backgrounds. Apart from the problems with the availability of educational opportunities throughout the country, there are also qualitative deficits, as the PISA study by the OECD³² documents, according to which Colombia ranks third from the bottom in matters of education.

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In the regions, the inequality of opportunity is even worse. A new report by the Colombian Administrative Department of Statistics DANE about material poverty and inequality of opportunity, which shows figures for 2012 subdivided by department, speaks volumes. The average income of a resident of Bogotá is six times that of an inhabitant of the poorest department Chocó, for example. The report also gives the national per capita income for 2012 as approximately 196 euros, while it was 336 euros in Bogotá – 1.7

30 | The Gini index of landownership is 0.88. Cf. "Así es la Colombia rural", *Revista Semana*, 2012, <http://semana.com/especiales/pilares-tierra/asi-es-la-colombia-rural.html> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

31 | Verónica Téllez Oliveros, "Ciudades colombianas: más desiguales", *El Espectador*, 8 Oct 2013, <http://elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/ciudades-colombianas-mas-desiguales-articulo-451323> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

32 | Colombia opted to take part in the PISA study although it is not an OECD state.

times the national average – and only 89 euros in Chocó, i.e. 55 per cent less than the national average. This illustrates the vast discrepancies between the regions.

Decentralisation in Colombia: There Still Remains Much to Do after 25 Years

The first steps towards political decentralisation in Colombia were taken over 25 years ago. The period of the National Front – with its “political barrier” that did not permit any alternatives to the existing two-party system – was followed by a wave of strikes and vociferous protests, where demands for improvements to public services were put forward. The decentralisation efforts faced great challenges. There was a need to strengthen local institutions, empower civil society, reallocate responsibilities and funds, and create a new framework for the relationship between central government and local administration.³³

From 1986 onwards, some progress was made through the direct election of mayors and governors. The model of a unitary state with autonomous territorial units was enshrined in the 1991 constitution. A comprehensive regulatory framework gave form to this model, which enhanced participatory democracy and made provisions for funding as well as emphasising the social dimension of decentralisation. In the regions in particular, the state must ensure the provision of healthcare, education and drinking water amongst other things. And with the direct election of the governors, the first step was taken towards strengthening the middle administrative level.³⁴

However, problems soon arose within the system. The functions of the departments were not clearly defined. At the end of the 1990s, the government attempted to

33 | Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, Viviana Barberena, Luis Jorge Garay and Juan Manuel Ospina, “25 años de la descentralización en Colombia”, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Colombia, Apr 2010, <http://kas.de/kolumbien/es/publications/19274> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

34 | Viviana Barberena Nisimblat, “Descentralización en Colombia: 25 años preparando el territorio para la paz”, *Razón Pública*, 3 Jun 2013, <http://razonpublica.com/index.php/politica-y-gobierno-temas-27/6871-descentralizacion-en-colombia-25-anos-preparando-el-territorio-para-la-paz.html> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

revise the funding laid down in the constitution in view of the financial crisis. A trend towards “recentralisation” emerged, the impact of which can still be felt today. The distribution of the “*regalías*”, the revenues from the extraction of natural resources, had been regulated by a law that came into force in 1994. But an imbalance remained as it placed 80 per cent of the resources in the hands of a mere 17 per cent of the population, and just five of the country’s 32 departments possessed 64 per cent of the resources.

Under the Santos government, two important steps were taken in this area. One was the reform of the system of *regalías*, which provided for all regions to have access to resources and not just those where fossil resources were being extracted. The complex rules are still impeding the disbursement of funds, which means it is too early to take stock. A further step in addressing the structural problems in the administration was an amendment to the basic law on land use. This has, however, produced considerable disillusionment.

The Santos government reformed the system of *regalías*, which provided for all regions to have access to resources and not just those where fossil resources were being extracted.

Perhaps the point in history the country currently finds itself in – with a peace process that necessitates the long-desired changes and could actually facilitate them – provides a good basis for addressing these subjects effectively. There is a need at both regional and local level not only for the peace agreements to be implemented, but also for issues of social and regional inclusion to be resolved.

FROM THE SYMPTOMS TO THE CAUSES: APPROACHES TO DECENTRALISATION³⁵

Colombia is a fragmented nation, on account of the high levels of inequality – between center and periphery, city and country, rich and poor – as well as the fact that the process of building the state and distributing power in the regions has not yet been completed. The armed conflict

35 | A KAS program in Colombia is currently collaborating with experts from the Network of Initiatives for Governability, Democracy and Land Development (RINDE) in an investigation into the subjects of decentralisation and peace. The authors would like to thank Viviana Barberena, who coordinates the RINDE network and the study, for providing the academic sources used to devise this chapter.

and the continuing presence of armed illegal groups are symptoms of the problems and exacerbate them at the same time. For this reason, an efficient strategy for a comprehensive resolution of these problems must, on the one hand, include the restoration of the state monopoly on power across the entire state territory and a strengthened security policy, and, on the other hand, the civil presence of the state, i.e. its efficient operation in the areas of administration, jurisdiction, education and infrastructure.

To this end and to initiate the changes that will lead to greater social and regional inclusion, the following principles will need to be applied in the work to devise potential approaches and in the decision-making:

- An efficient and effective system of administration at local and department level in all regions of Colombia. In many areas, there is no state presence; in others, the state does have a presence, but does not operate effectively. Corruption and exploitation for personal gain, putting private interests above public ones, play a role in this, as does a lack of skills at local and department levels.
- The aim of achieving justice in the sense of equality of opportunity should be borne in mind throughout; this includes aspects such as access to public services, education and employment.
- Even if, as described above, minimum guarantees were to exist for all citizens in all regions so that true territorial cohesion is achieved, the special features and diverse problems of the individual areas should be taken into account. Solutions reflecting this diversity must be found to address various problems in the different regions. Programs and measures to improve infrastructure and education, for instance, must be adapted to the special circumstances of the respective region.
- The most important areas and topics should be addressed first. In view of the ambitious goal and unresolved questions in so many regions, existing funds will likely not be sufficient to address every problem in every part of

Solutions must be found to address various problems in the different regions. Programs and measures to improve education, for instance, must be adapted to the special circumstances of the respective region.

the country immediately. However, focusing on the most badly affected and most backward areas would preclude the risk of creating even larger discrepancies between the regions and making excessive demands on the capabilities of the institutions and the funding.

Even though it is impossible to examine every potential approach in detail here, the following fundamental courses of action are essential for decision-makers in their efforts to continue building the country:

1. State Efficiency and Decentralisation

For this aspect, the definition of functions and their delegation to the local and intermediate levels are of prime importance. The intermediate level (of the departments) in particular needs to be strengthened, as it is of great significance in a potential post-conflict scenario for two reasons. Firstly, any agreement arrived at in negotiations will have practical repercussions at the level of the local communities. Secondly, large parts of the programs and political measures involving the provision of goods and services necessary to fulfil basic needs are and will continue to be devised at national level. The intermediate level has the remit to coordinate the decisions made at national level and their practical implementation at local level.

A further starting point is the operational capability of the legislature. In Colombia, there is something that could be described as legislative inflation: many laws, little implementation. This has produced a complex web of interrelationships between institutions, producing conflicts of interest and tensions between different authorities that are meant to implement the policies. For this reason, it is necessary to create an institutional and legal framework that clearly allocates the responsibilities between the state, department and local levels. This will require a number of central, general directives that will produce clarity in this area.

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Initiating these measures and strengthening the capability of the regional and local authorities to implement them will require progress to be made regarding the use of resources

at department and local levels. Particular attention must be paid to the funds for investment expenditure, as this is the means whereby funds flow from the center to the regions. Although the amounts involved have decreased from the 1990s to 2010,³⁶ the Santos government is now making efforts to raise the investment budget to 5.7 per cent of 2013 GDP – representing a historic high in Colombian history at over 40 trillion pesos.³⁷ Supporting and boosting this investment with funds that will flow into infrastructure, the social sphere as well as into support for the economy is of central importance for improving production capacity and productivity in the country.

Another important point is equality of opportunity regarding access to resources by the individual regional or local

To ensure efficient and professionally operating public services all public employees and public service institutions must be subjected to the principles of competitiveness.

authorities. The most recent reform of the general system of *regalías* in 2012 was to ensure that all departments – and not only those in whose territory natural resources are located – should in principle have access to these resources. Another main objective is to ensure legal security and efficient administration. A graduated state presence is not only measured by the existence or lack of state institutions; the quality of public administration in the different regions is also of great importance. To ensure efficient and professionally operating public services in all regions requires a certain level of human resources and material infrastructure. And all public employees and public service institutions must be subjected to the principles of competitiveness. One central aspect here is a sensible distribution of qualified personnel across the regions. A further aspect is the need to achieve better skills and

36 | “¿Hacia dónde se dirigen los recursos de Inversión del Presupuesto General de la Nación?”, Colombian Central Bank, Aug 2006, <http://banrep.gov.co/docum/ftp/borra405.pdf> (accessed 14 Feb 2014); cf. “Proyecto de Presupuesto General de la Nación 2010” (Draft for the general budget 2010), Colombian Ministry of Finance, 29 Jul 2009, http://www.minhacienda.gov.co/portal/page/portal/MinHacienda1/MinistryFinance/elministerio/prensa/Presentaciones/2009/PRESENTACION%20PROYECTO%20DE%20PRESUPUESTO%202010_0.pdf (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

37 | “Presupuesto de 2013 será de \$185,5 billones”, *Dinero*, 27 Jul 2012, <http://www.dinero.com/actualidad/economia/articulo/presupuesto-2013-sera-1855-billones/156065> (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

higher qualifications among the employees in the public sector at local and department levels.

Progress in guaranteeing certainty of the law constitutes a further point. A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice showed that seven out of ten Colombians thought the country's judicial system worked very slowly; and four out of ten said legal officials were "corrupt".³⁸ There is a need to strengthen the legal institutions to speed up legal processes – and this requires more and better trained officials.

Finally, any endeavour to increase the efficiency of the state must achieve progress where transparency and accountability are concerned. Despite measures such as the creation of the Secretariat for Transparency, which reports to the President, Colombia is still one of the most corrupt states in the world.³⁹ The understanding that public resources should be regarded as such and not as items available for private enrichment must be brought home to both officials as well as people at the base, the citizens, in an intensive learning process.

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2. Strengthening Representative Democracy

In 2013, a number of social demands led to public protests, which exposed the inability of the political parties – and other representative bodies of democracy – to channel the issues concerning citizens and to address them effectively. For this reason, the political parties should make efforts to strengthen democracy within their organisations. In this context, it is worthwhile to contemplate structures of a more horizontal character, which would allow citizens

38 | Rodrigo Uprimny, Miguel Emilio La Rota, Sebastián Lalinde and Diego Eduardo López, "Encuesta nacional de necesidades jurídicas y acceso a la justicia. Marco conceptual y metodológico", 2013, http://dejusticia.org/admin/file.php?table=documentos_publicacion&field=archivo&id=323 (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

39 | "Índice de Percepción de Corrupción 2013: A pesar de avances normativos, Colombia mantiene altos niveles de percepción de corrupción", Transparencia por Colombia, 2013, http://transparenciacolombia.org.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=441&Itemid=490 (accessed 14 Feb 2014).

greater participation both within the party structure and in the selection of candidates and representative bodies. Citizens and members should look upon the parties as bodies beyond clientelist interests, as a democratic mouthpiece for voicing their concerns and interests – which is their *raison d'être*, after all.

3. Overcoming Inequality

Although there is no lack of other political topics in the country, overcoming inequality – or at least creating a set of instruments to gradually decrease it – is one of its most important tasks. One crucial aspect in this context is education as the basis for social mobility and for access to greater and better employment opportunities for all, but also as an important component of the country's socio-economic development. It is not only wide availability that is important here but quality as well. Not only will it be necessary to build more education centers – particularly in areas where they have been absent

It is important to expand the offering of vocational and professional education in the regions, as the majority of institutions for professional education are currently concentrated in the large cities.

in the past – but access to them must be secured as well. Where availability is concerned, it is important to expand the offering of vocational and professional education in the regions, as the majority of institutions for technical, technological and professional education are currently concentrated in the large cities. The qualification of teachers is also of great importance, as are the improvement of their working conditions and terms of employment as well as the application of quality standards to allow strengths and improvement potentials to be identified and measured.

Developing the labour market is another task the decision-makers need to fulfil. This indicator not only demands an increase in the general income level but also an increase in labour quality. The quality issue also arises in connection with the healthcare and pension systems – neither of which is secured as yet in Colombia. There is also a need to reduce the gap between higher and lower earners – the latter forming the majority, particularly among those working in the informal sector. There is further a great need to improve working conditions in areas such as agriculture,

manufacturing, construction, retail as well as services for private households.

There is further a need for improvement regarding the facilities for negotiation and cooperation between employers and employees with the involvement of the trade unions. One example of the deficits in this area is the determination of the annual increase in the minimum wage, which has previously always been fixed by the government because the two sides of industry could not come to an agreement. Colombia also remains one of the most dangerous countries for trade unionists, although there has been some progress in this area.⁴⁰

Finally, the political agenda must prioritise the expansion of infrastructure and communication facilities, both for the country's competitiveness and for regional integration. Expanding and improving infrastructure will also entail a mechanism of state presence. One key role in this is played by the channels of communication between the center and the periphery as well as between the east and the west of the country. The Santos government is making concerted efforts in this area, but it is too early to take stock as there are no demonstrable results to date.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK: "WITHOUT THE STATE, THERE WILL BE NEITHER PEACE NOR DEMOCRACY."⁴¹

Having taken stock and examined the current panorama of Colombia's social and political development, one clearly sees that there is still a long way to go. However, Colombia is a country with a great deal of potential and many resources that can help it realise its goals, which may appear ambitious, but which are essential to the country's development. Colombia is experiencing a phase in its history when opportunities must not remain untapped: enduring peace as well as the building of a nation based on greater participation are on the agenda. This could be the right moment to contemplate not only a post-conflict

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40 | In 1996, the murders of 282 trade unionists were registered; in 2010, the figure was 51, in 2011 30 and in 2012 20.

41 | Marco Palacios, "Violencia y paz: sin Estado no habrá paz ni democracia", *Revista Credencial Historia*, No. 119, 1999.

scenario but also the building of a country which is facing problems that fuelled and exacerbated the armed confrontation in the past.

The measures taken by the various governments were important and necessary but insufficient, as they ultimately did not address the structural aspects of the conflict. There is a need for a more fundamental change, which will exact a high economic and political price – and it will not be a speedy process but one extending over the medium and long term. Guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug dealers may have changed their names and adapted to the prevailing conditions, but they still represent a threat to the state and create rival “para-states”. Efforts for sustainable peace must therefore include political and economic measures that will provide an effective answer to the tasks facing the country. Ultimately, the peace process will not be sustainable unless it involves the genuine inclusion of all regions and areas of society in a new system in the post-conflict era.

This will not only necessitate a government program addressing these issues in its tenor and through concrete measures. It will also require politicians to change their attitudes, because recent unrest and protests have shown that Colombians are tired of the lack of concrete solutions for the society’s enduring problems. The country appears to be immune to the ideas of “21st Century Socialism” in Latin America, but in actual fact it is not. Colombia is not invulnerable to the emergence of right-wing or left-wing populism in the medium or long term, which could take advantage of the feeling of political powerlessness that is prevalent in parts of this society. There is an urgent need in Colombia for flatter hierarchies in politics, stronger interconnections and decentralisation combined with a strengthening of the state and genuine integration of the regions into the country’s governmental system.

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