

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

AD HOC DELEGATION
TO OBSERVE THE GENERAL ELECTIONS
IN GUATEMALA

(28 December 2003)

REPORT

by Fernando FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍN
Delegation chairman

Introduction

The 20 November 2003 meeting of the Conference of Presidents authorised the delegation which had taken part in observing the first round of Guatemalan general elections on 9 November, to help observe the second round on 28 December (point 14.2).

For personal reasons, some of those who had taken part in the first round were unable to participate the second time, and their replacement was authorised.

The delegation for the 28 December electoral observation mission therefore comprised:

Fernando FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍN, PPE-DE

Ana MIRANDA de LAGE, PSE

Emilio MENÉNDEZ del VALLE, PSE

Sérgio MARQUES, PPE-DE

Encarnación REDONDO JIMÉNEZ, PPE-DE

On 17 December, the delegation held a preparatory meeting to which Jannis SAKELLARIOU, MEP, was invited as Chairman of the EU Electoral Observation Mission. He reported on the unfolding of the electoral campaign for the second round, and on the appeals submitted to the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Court on the results of the last round. The meeting decided to appoint Mr FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍN chairman of the EP Delegation.

Domestic situation:

The results of the 9 November first round, in which 58% of the registered electors voted, were not much disputed. The elections had to be re-run in only four local authorities, where there had been incidents such as the burning of ballot boxes.

The occasional tense moments which had characterised the campaign leading up to the first round were not repeated, and the calm and tranquil atmosphere which prevailed for the second round was largely due to the fact that the electoral proposals showed little difference, and the absence of the opposition of part of the electorate to a specific candidate, as had happened in the first round.

A further factor to be pointed out is the fact that the electorate was less interested in the presidential election, particularly in inland areas. The high level of participation in the first round was largely due to the fact that the presidential elections had coincided with the municipal elections, the latter being of great concern to Guatemalans. Furthermore, 28 December is hardly a date to encourage a high turn out.

The election campaign:

The two candidates who had won most votes in the first round were:

Coalición Gran Alianza Nacional (GANA) candidates: Oscar BERGER and Eduardo STEIN

Unión Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) candidates: Álvaro COLOM and Fernando ANDRADE.

In the first round, GANA had won 34.33% of the votes and UNE 26.36%.

Both parties are relatively new, GANA being scarcely six months old, and UNE a year.

For the 9 November elections, no political party had put forward a real electoral programme, and they did not do so in the second round either, although UNE did sketch out something that could be a government programme. During the campaign, there was only one debate held, since Oscar BERGER had indicated his dislike of them. He had most supporters in the urban areas, particularly the capital, where the print media is more easily available.

As in the first round, various polls were published, described as unreliable by various of our Guatemalan contacts, since they had been taken in urban areas above all, and many of them by telephone. Nonetheless, their forecasts proved correct.

The Supreme Electoral Court (SEC) had made major efforts to prevent the recurrence of any of the problems experienced in the first round. It was calculated that some 18 000 voters had been unable to take part then (estimated at 70 000 by the EU Electoral Observation Mission's experts). The SEC took reasonable account of the suggestions and recommendations made by the international observer bodies, with the electoral register being corrected, and significant improvements made to polling stations, with an increased presence of SEC staff providing information, for example.

However, the existence of errors of the electoral register, which could not be entirely eliminated, constituted a black mark, and although the impact was less serious than in the first round, this problem must be resolved. The SEC's own President, Oscar BALAÑOS, admitted how difficult it was to draw up the electoral register: the total population varies, according to the source used, between 11 236 000 and 14 million!

The media coverage of the candidates was pretty much balanced, although there were twice as many mentions of Eduardo STEIN, the GANA vice-presidential candidate, as of Fernando ANDRADE, the UNE candidate.

The representatives of the former members of the civil self-defence patrols, PAC, stayed on the fringes of the campaign failing to get firm promises of payment from either candidate. Unlike the first round stance of the Guatemalan Republican Front (GRF). They were expected to renew their demands once the new president is inaugurated.

Meetings with the candidates:

During the first round, the delegation was unable to meet the UNE candidate, Álvaro COLOM, due to illness. At the meeting during the second round, he informed us of his expectations of the elections, in the wake of his major countryside campaign. He hoped that he would be supported by the indigenous and rural voters, as a counterbalance to the greater support enjoyed by his opponent in the towns. He said that he had every trust in the SEC, although there were rumoured to be over 40 000 forged identity cards in circulation. He said that he would accept the results of the second round.

The greatest problem facing whatever government was elected, would be the fragmentation of the Chamber of Deputies: of a total of 158, 48 were GANA, 43 were GRF, 17 were PAN and 32 were UNE.

Eduardo STEIN, the GANA vice-presidential candidate, spoke about his party's two-pronged 'integration' policy: firstly, to integrate the indigenous population in to national politics, and secondly, encourage Central American integration. Here the fight against terrorism, crime and drug trafficking would be priorities. Of particular concern to the new government, as for some of its Central American neighbours, particularly Honduras, was the rise in so-called 'maras', urban gangs, which in certain city districts engaged in full-scale battles, and were also responsible for many crimes against property and individuals.

The priorities would therefore be:

- fighting poverty and underdevelopment
- developing cooperation with the local authorities
- setting up an indigenous advisory council
- implementing the 'dry canal' project
- indemnification of the victims of violence
- fighting, smuggling and tax evasion.

The delegation was particularly interested in the rural development scheme, which would cover:

- fighting rural poverty
- reforestation
- precision agriculture
- territorial planning.

Finally, he referred to the need to get back to the 'Fiscal Pact' on the scale envisaged by the peace agreements.

Other meetings:

Oscar BOLAÑOS, the President of the SEC, informed us of the improvements the Court had made to the lists, provision of information, security and the actual holding of the elections. He stressed the use of the radio, and the fact that electoral information had been provided in 12 of the 21 official languages, compared with only four in the 1999 elections.

He also mentioned the complaints from one candidate that he had requested the electoral register and had not received it until the day before the vote took place.

Finally, he said that a volunteer corps of 1230 persons had been set up, whose effectiveness the members of the delegation could check in the various polling stations they were visiting.

The Election Day itself:

Both parties made efforts to facilitate the transport of voters to the polling stations, and made appeals for people to get out and vote.

The delegation spread out its observation activities in three groups, who followed different itineraries.

The elections passed off without incident, under conditions of complete normality as far as public order and security were concerned. This also applied to the four local authorities where the mayoral elections were being re-run.

Absolutely normality reigned in the power stations, due both to the organisational improvements and the much simpler voting requirements.

Conclusion:

Despite the fact that only 46.78% voted as against 57.89% in the first round, the turnouts were both higher than those of 1999 elections (53.9% and 40.4% Oscar BERGER won by 54.1% against Álvaro COLOM's 45.8%.

This good turnout demonstrates the solidity of the democratic process in Guatemala and popular commitment to democracy. The way in which people turned out, particularly in the countryside, having to cover long distances under their own steam in order to vote, should be applauded.

Despite the fact that the SEC had done a pretty good job, the international observers did note certain persisting shortcomings. The electoral register had still not been successfully completed and several thousand electors were unable to vote in either round. The refusal to supply political parties with copies of the electoral register in good time was something else that needed to be sorted out for future elections.

The tasks facing the President who took office on 14 January 2004 are colossal: firstly, he will need to have parliamentary majority which he currently does not. The role of the GRF is fundamental here. Although its leaders supported neither of the candidates, they might be more inclined to supported UNE. An alliance with this party, the only one in Guatemala which actually merits the name, could give GANA a majority in the House. An alliance with UNE, with which it is clearly more in tune, would also provide a majority. Any negotiations would involve consolidating GANA, which is a tripartite alliance.

With a certain amount of solid support in the House, the new government will have to tackle the urgent problems facing it. Many of them are the classical problems of fighting poverty and underdevelopment, strengthening the institutions, fighting corruption and impunity, and the issue of tax reform. Others, whoever, are new, such as rising insecurity, particularly in towns, and the growth in drug trafficking.

Further developing and applying the Peace Agreement, which could make a major contribution to resolving many of these problems, is something that a new government needs to put fresh life into, as a demonstration of its commitment to Guatemalan society as a whole.

PARLAMENTO EUROPEO

Delegación ad-hoc para la observación de las elecciones en Guatemala (2ª vuelta)

28 de diciembre de 2003

Programa

Viernes, 26 de diciembre		Madrid/Guatemala
18:45	Llegada a Guatemala city (vuelo IB 6111 proveniente de Madrid)	
	Traslado de la delegación e instalación en el Hotel Westin Camino Real Guatemala Avenida La Reforma y 14 Calle, Zona 10 Guatemala City Tel: (502) 333-3000 Fax: (502) 337-4313	
Sábado, 27 de diciembre		Guatemala
09:30	Briefing con la Presidencia y los Embajadores de la UE <i>Lugar: Hotel Camino Real, Salón La Ronda</i>	
10:30	Reunión con el Sr. Oscar BOLANOS Presidente del Tribunal Supremo Electoral <i>Lugar: Hotel Tikal Futura, salón Londres</i>	
12:00	Reunión con el candidato Sr. Alvaro COLOM por el partido "UNE" Unión Nacional por la Esperanza <i>Lugar: Hotel Quinta Real, suite 438</i>	
13:00	Reunión con Sr. Eduardo STEIN, por la coalición "GANA" <i>Lugar: Sede del partido GANA 20 Calle 2-89, Zona 10</i>	
14:00	Encuentro con el Jefe de la Misión de Observación Sr. Jannis SAKELLARIOU <i>Lugar: Hotel Melia</i>	
tarde	Visita a Antigua de Guatemala	

Domingo 28 de diciembre		Guatemala
06.30	Salida del hotel	
07.00	Apertura oficial de los Recintos Electorales <i>Lugar: centro Ciudad de Guatemala</i>	
	Despliegue de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la UE.. Lugares a observar: Guatemala city, Antigua, Chichicastenango, Quetzaltenango...	
13.00	Visita a colegios electorales Evaluación preliminar <i>Lugar: hotel Meliá, salón La Ermita</i>	
....	Asistencia a cierre de colegios electorales Regreso de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la UE a Guatemala city	
19.00	Encuentros con la Prensa acreditada <i>Lugar: Hotel Meliá, junto con la Misión de Observación</i>	

Lunes, 29 de diciembre		Guatemala / Madrid
09.00	Reunión de evaluación de la votación y escrutinio <i>Lugar: Hotel Meliá, nivel 11, oficina de la MOEG</i>	
10.30	Rueda de prensa <i>Lugar: Hotel MELIÁ, Salón La Ermita</i>	
13:00	Almuerzo ofrecido por el Presidente de la Delegación	
17.00	Salida hacia el aeropuerto	
19:30	Regreso de la delegación hacia Europa (vuelo IB 6112 via Miami)	

PARLAMENTO EUROPEO

Delegación para la observación de las elecciones en Guatemala

28 de diciembre de 2003

Lista de Participantes

Miembros de la Delegación

Nombre	Apellido	Grupo político	País
Sr. Fernando	FERNÁNDEZ MARTIN , Presidente • <i>Comisión de Desarrollo y Cooperación</i>	PPE-DE	España
Sr. Sérgio	MARQUES • <i>Comisión de Política Regional, Transportes y Turismo</i>	PPE-DE	Portugal
Sr. Emilio	MENÉNDEZ del VALLE • <i>Comisión de Asuntos Exteriores, Derechos Humanos, Seguridad Común y Política de Defensa</i>	PSE	España
Sra. Ana	MIRANDA DE LAGE • <i>Comisión de Industria, Comercio Exterior, Investigación y Energía</i>	PSE	España
Sra. Encarnación	REDONDO JIMÉNEZ • <i>Comisión de Agricultura y Desarrollo rural</i>	PPE-DE	España

Grupos Políticos de los Miembros de la Delegación

PPE-DE	- Grupo del Partido Popular Europeo (Demócrata-Cristianos) y Demócratas Europeos
PSE	- Grupo del Partido de los Socialista Europeos
UEN	- Grupo Unión por la Europa de las Naciones

Secretaría de la Delegación

Sr. Luis	MARTÍNEZ-GUILLÉN	Administrador Principal
Sr. Raymond	HERDIES	Asistente Principal

Secretarías de los Grupos Políticos

Sr. Juan	SALAFRANCA	Grupo PPE-DE
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