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By Marcos Salgado

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Petro and Macron at the center of an international movement against the blockade and for dialogue in Venezuela



Sources: CLAE

A strategy to restart the dialogue between the government and the opposition in Venezuela, which has an actor unthinkable until just a few months ago: Colombia, is advancing at a rapid pace.

Or, strictly speaking, the president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, who was received with honors by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on November 1 in a historic meeting at the Miraflores Palace in Caracas, where they held a private meeting for more than two hours.

Then both presidents were brief before the press when communicating the scope of the meeting, but now it seems clear that the issue of dialogue between the government and the

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Venezuelan opposition was on the agenda. Or at least that's what emerges from the moves that President Petro is executing at this time in Europe.

The Colombian president met with his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, in a meeting where the Venezuela issue was present. Petro is scheduled to meet with another visitor to Paris, Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, who will also meet with the French president.

The Europa Press agency said that in Paris they meet at this time "government and opposition in Venezuela summoned by the French president" who wants to "take advantage of the reconfiguration that is taking place in Latin America to force the parties to sit down to dialogue." The text is, of course, from the agency and not from the French government.

In fact, front-line spokesmen for the Venezuelan government instantly reject pressures, when they are official. Diosdado Cabello, the number two of Chavismo, rejected the statement of the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, who urged President Nicolás Maduro to resume negotiations with the opposition.

Careerists and tiempists

"What if we don't feel like it? What are you going to do Trudeau? What are you going to do to us immediately? You have to be very gafo (foolish) to make those statements! It also immediately exhorts almost that President Nicolás Maduro ran out of where he was to resume the talks (ironically) as if they had to see something in that, if they go after the European Union and the United States, exhort whom?" It is thus clear that dialogue has its times, and not everyone can take some credit for having driven it.

Different from Trudeau's careerist attempt seems to be the move of Macron, who spoke in an informal conversation (but which became news when the Venezuelan government disseminated it through several channels) with President Maduro in the corridors of COP27. There the two agreed to continue talking.

Meanwhile, in France begins at this time the "Paris Forum for Peace" in which the chief negotiator of the Venezuelan government and president of the National Assembly, Jorge Rodríguez, and also the main negotiator of the opposition, former mayor Gerardo Blyde, will be present.

Before arriving in Paris, the opponents released a statement indicating the "importance of obtaining results (in dialogue) urgently to address the unprecedented social and political crisis."

Although the dialogue has been formally suspended for a year, in protest of the extradition from Cape Verde to the United States of Venezuelan businessman and diplomat Alex Saab, communication channels were never suspended. In May, Rodriguez and Blyde photographed themselves in the gardens of a colonial residence in northern Caracas, saying they were looking for "formulas of action for the future." In June, the two met publicly again at a forum on mediation in Norway. Precisely that country is a mediator in the dialogues in Mexico.

Petro intercedes

Now in Caracas it is informally assured that there will be news in the dialogue before the end of this 2022. Will Paris be the place to announce the reactivation of Mexico's dialogue? For now it is clear that the initiative brings together diverse actors, with President Petro at the helm, who also in Paris said that Presidents Biden and Maduro should meet. Although he limited it to the initiative he promotes to save the Amazon, his words – anything but casual – remained floating in the air.

Petro has already been interceding with the White House for the US blockade against the planes of the Venezuelan state Conviasa. Flights between Bogota and Caracas began this week. On the Venezuelan side, with frequencies from Turpial, a private airline; A plane from the Colombian state-owned Satena flew to the Simón Bolívar airport in Colombia. Venezuelan Transport Minister Ramon Velasquez, who received the plane, said they will continue with "strategic patience" waiting for flights from Conviasa to Bogota; and at his side his Colombian counterpart, Guillermo Reyes, trusted in the blockade against Conviasa will yield soon, and confirmed that President Petro works for that. They are moves that must be read all together, never isolated.

For the moment and pending announcements, it seems clear that an eventual formal resumption of dialogue between the Venezuelan government and opposition already has new actors, and we must read it again in terms of the changes that occurred during this year: the victory of Petro; Lula's victory that rebalances the continent; the departure of Juan Guaidó and, finally, the results not as terrible as predicted (and for that reason a kind of victory) for the Democrats in the midterm elections in the United States, which could accelerate, without the pressure of the party lobbies, an agreement between Caracas and Washington, which has clear objectives from side to side. For the Biden administration, access to Venezuelan oil in times of global energy reconfiguration; for the government of Nicolás Maduro the sustained de-escalation of the blockade.

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