

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION

for relations with

LATIN AMERICA

Background note

on

THE CONTADORA GROUP

and

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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1 THE CONTADORA GROUP

1. The Contadora Group, named after a Panamanian island, was formed in January 1983 by the Presidents of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela with the aim of seeking a peaceful settlement to the Central American conflicts. The four Contadora countries are not directly involved in the conflicts but, given their geographical location, are particularly concerned about the crisis in the region. The five countries most directly involved are Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica. The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica (which has no army and tries to remain neutral) tend in varying degrees to be close to United States policy in the region. The two principal armed conflicts in the region are: (1) In El Salvador, between the government and anti-Government forces. (In mid-October 1984, a first meeting between the two sides at the initiative of President Duarte represented a very significant step towards a negotiated settlement); (2) In Nicaragua, between the Government and rebels - the so-called 'contras' based principally in Honduras and Costa Rica and who receive backing from the United States. There is also an armed conflict between the Government and rebels in Guatemala.
2. Following a number of meetings at foreign minister level, the Presidents of the Contadora countries met at Cancun in Mexico in July 1983 and adopted the so-called Cancun Declaration, which was duly ratified by the countries concerned at the end of September 1983. Amongst other things, the Declaration affirmed that peace in Central America can only be achieved by respecting the fundamental principles of co-existence between nations, non-intervention, self-determination, the sovereign equality of States, cooperation for economic and social development, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the free and genuine expression of the popular will.
3. On 9 September 1983 in Panama, the Foreign Ministers of the five Central American countries, with the participation of the Contadora Group, signed a document known as the Panama Pact or the "Document of Objectives". In this document the Central American countries

declared their intention of achieving 21 objectives which have since formed the basis of the Contadora initiative. The objectives set out in the Panama Pact include the following:

- To promote détente and put an end to conflict in the area ...
- To ensure the strict observance of the principles of international law ...
- To adopt measures designed to enable the establishment and improvement of systems of democratic representation and pluralism ...
- To ban the installation on their territory of foreign military bases and any other forms of outside military interference ...
- To draw up an agreement to reduce, with a view to eliminating, the presence of foreign military advisers and other outside elements involved in military or security activities.
- To eliminate arms traffic between regions or from outside the region ...
- To prevent the use of their territory and not to give military or logistic assistance or allow it to be given to persons, organizations or groups which may attempt to destabilize the governments of the Central American countries.

(There were also a number of provisions concerning trade, social and economic development, and economic integration).

4. The United Nations General Assembly, the Organisation of American States and the United States are also amongst those who have expressed their support for the Contadora initiative.
5. On 8 January 1984 in Panama, the Foreign Ministers of the Contadora Group signed a further document entitled 'Rules for fulfilling the commitments undertaken in the statement of objectives'. In June 1984, the Contadora countries drew up a draft 'Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America'.
6. A particularly significant development in the Contadora process was the adoption by the four Contadora States in Panama on 7 September 1984 of a revised draft "Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America", which sought to reflect the views of the five Central American Governments and was submitted to the United Nations on 25 September 1984. The intention and hope of the Contadora Group is that the Central American states will sign this Act which has been subject to a number of proposed amendments and which remains in draft form. The Act, which runs to 55 pages, and which reflects the general principles enunciated by the Contadora Group in its earlier declarations, contains detailed and specific proposals for the peaceful resolution of the region's conflicts.
7. The revised draft Act as submitted in September 1984 contains five main chapters:

Part I

General Commitments

The General commitments reflect the objectives and principles laid down by the Contadora Group in its earlier documents such as: resolution of controversies by peaceful means, respect for existing borders, non-use of territory for actions against the sovereign rights of other States, non-intervention and self-determination.

Commitments on Political Affairs

According to these commitments, the parties would agree to promote mutual confidence and refrain from hostile propaganda. They would take measures aimed at establishing and perfecting representative and pluralistic democratic systems and, where pertinent, promote immediate national reconciliation actions and make possible a true amnesty. They would guarantee full respect for human rights. They would take several measures with regard to the electoral process, including the promulgation or revision of electoral legislation "so as to guarantee the effective participation of the people as a whole".

Commitments on Security Affairs

The parties would prohibit the holding of international military manoeuvres within their respective territories (to take effect within 30 days of the signing of the Act). Detailed commitments would be made with a view to halting the arms race in all its forms and to limiting the number of military personnel under arms. Foreign military bases or schools would be eliminated within six months of the signing of the Act. Foreign military advisers engaged in operational and training activities would be withdrawn and those involved in maintenance would be kept within reasonable limits. The intra-regional and extra-regional flow of arms would be limited and support for irregular forces, for terrorism or for subversion would be prohibited.

Commitments on Economic and Social Affairs

Various measures are envisaged for the strengthening of the process of economic integration in Central America and for solving the refugee problem.

Part II

Execution and Follow-up

The Act contains detailed provisions concerning its execution and follow-up.

8. The Act also contains an additional protocol which is open for signature by all states which wish to contribute to peace and cooperation in Central America and which accept the terms of the Act without reservation. Signatories to the additional protocol would commit themselves amongst other things to abstaining from any actions which might prevent the Contadora Act from attaining its objectives, and to cooperating with the Central American states for the success of the Act. Several states, including France, Spain and Portugal, are understood to have indicated their intention of signing the additional protocol.¹
9. Nicaragua announced on 22 September that it was prepared to sign, immediately and without further modification, the Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America. At the same time, it requested that the United States should sign and ratify the additional protocol (see paragraph above).
10. The United States considered the proposed peace treaty to be a good basis for negotiations, but believed that it required certain amendments.
11. Although all five Central American countries accepted in general terms the proposed treaty, a number of them - notably El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica - registered some objections and called for its revision.
12. The Ten Member States of the European Community have consistently supported the efforts of the Contadora Group to achieve a peaceful settlement to the region's problems, most recently in a reply to a question in the European Parliament on 9 May 1985.
13. On 28 and 29 September 1984, the Foreign Ministers of the Ten Member States of the Community attended a Conference in San José, the capital of Costa Rica. The conference was also attended by the

¹ Le Monde, 2 October 1984

Foreign Ministers of the Contadora Group countries, of the Central American countries and of Spain and Portugal. At the beginning of September, the US Secretary of State had addressed a letter to the Ten requesting that no aid or comfort should be given to Nicaragua at the San José meeting.¹ The attendance of the Foreign Ministers of the Ten symbolised their concern about the situation in Central America and in the joint communique the Ten, amongst other things, reaffirmed their support for the Contadora process in the following terms:

"6. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of peace, democracy, security and economic and social development, and political stability in Central America and were united in the view that the problems of that region cannot be solved by armed force, but only by political solutions springing from the region itself. In this conviction they affirmed their support for the pacification measures which are being developed in the Contadora process. They expressed their conviction that this process represents a genuinely regional initiative and the best opportunity to achieve a solution to the crisis through political undertakings aimed at the achievement of the aims set out in the "Document of Objectives" approved by all the Governments of the region on 9 September 1983. They noted with satisfaction the progress achieved so far towards such a solution, and that the revised draft Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America is a fundamental stage in the negotiating process for the attainment of peace in the region. They called on the States concerned to continue to make every effort to bring the Contadora process rapidly to final fruition through the signature of a comprehensive agreement which would bring peace to the region. They were agreed on the necessity for the verification and control of that implementation.

7. The European countries expressed their willingness to support, within their capabilities and if requested, the efforts of those states to which it falls to implement the provisions of any agreement."

¹The Financial Times, 1 October 1984

14. In mid-October 1984, the four Contadora countries met in Madrid with a view to finalising the Contadora Act. Although the meeting was unsuccessful in achieving this aim, the Contadora countries did commit themselves to "include in the final version of the Act the observations presented by the Central American countries which might contribute to greater precision without altering the balance achieved in the draft Act."
15. El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala met in Tegucigalpa in Honduras the day after the Madrid meeting in October 1984. At this meeting they emphasised the importance of ensuring that the bodies for verifying implementation of the Act "would have the authority necessary to fulfill their functions."
16. At the European Council in Dublin on 3 and 4 December 1984, the Heads of State or Government reiterated their support for the Contadora process and, in particular, they reaffirmed "their conviction that the problems of the region cannot be solved by armed force, but only by a political solution springing from the region itself and respecting the principles of non-interference and inviolability of frontiers."
17. It appeared early in 1985 that the attempts to conclude a final version of the Contadora Act had reached a stalemate. The situation was complicated by an incident involving a Nicaraguan citizen taking refuge in the Costa Rican Embassy in Managua for four months.
18. Following contacts by the Contadora countries on a bilateral basis with the countries of the region, and following the opportunity for renewing informal contacts offered by the investiture of the new Brazilian President on 15 March 1985, the Contadora countries opened what was described as the final phase of negotiations on 11 April 1985.
19. It is envisaged that a second meeting, along the lines of the San José meeting, involving the foreign ministers of the Ten, of Spain and Portugal, of the Contadora countries and of the Central American countries could take place later this year. On 15 May 1985

the Commission approved a recommendation to the Council concerning the opening of negotiations with the countries of Central America which are grouped together by the General Treaty on Central American Economic Cooperation and Panama with a view to concluding an overall cooperation treaty with both political and economic aspects.

II RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Nicaraguan elections

20. Presidential and parliamentary elections took place in Nicaragua on 4 November 1984. A number of international observers including an ad-hoc delegation from the European Parliament were present in Nicaragua for the elections.¹ Following disagreement about the conditions in which the elections were taking place, a number of opposition parties, which formed the so-called 'Coordinadora Democratica', declined to participate. The turn out of more than seventy-five per cent of the electorate, however, as well as the results which gave the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) more than 66% of the votes cast, were claimed by the Sandinistas as a major victory.

Relations between the United States and Nicaragua

21. Relations between the United States and Nicaragua remain difficult and tense. There have been no bilateral negotiations since the breakdown of the so-called 'Manzanillo talks' in autumn 1984, although the Secretary of State, Mr Shultz, met President Ortega in Montevideo on 1 March 1985 and Vice-President Bush met President Ortega in Brasilia on 15 March 1985. Among the points of disagreement between the two countries are the ongoing case at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, brought by Nicaragua against the United States for alleged aggression in Central America, and the repeated allegations by the United States that Nicaragua is receiving military assistance from the Soviet Union and its allies and is supporting revolution in other countries of the region.
22. On 23 April 1985 the US House of Representatives turned down by a large majority President Reagan's request for appropriations to give military assistance to the so-called 'contras' operating against the Nicaraguan government from Honduras and Costa Rica.

¹The Final Report of the European Parliament delegation was submitted to the enlarged Bureau (PE 93.990/Bur)

23. On 1 May 1985 President Reagan, during his visit to Europe, announced a total trade embargo against Nicaragua. An urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council took place at the request of Nicaragua to discuss the embargo.¹ The Latin American and Caribbean member countries of the Sistema Económico Latinoamericano (SELA) met in special session on 14 May 1985 and adopted unanimously a resolution condemning the US embargo and proposing an assistance plan to help Nicaragua survive the sanctions.

El Salvador

24. Parliamentary and local elections were held in El Salvador on 31 March 1985. The results of these elections were regarded as a major victory for President Duarte. After the elections President Duarte announced that he intended to resume negotiations with the left-wing guerillas but this proposal has not yet met with a positive response.

25. Honduras

A constitutional crisis occurred in Honduras at the end of March 1985, between the Government and the Parliament (in which the opposition has a majority), concerning the replacement of members of the Supreme Court. Following the appointment by the Parliament of a new President of the Supreme Court and the replacement of 4 other judges, the military intervened to arrest the newly appointed President of the Supreme Court. A complex agreement has now been reached between the Government and the Parliament and an end to the crisis now appears to be in sight.

Guatemala

26. The Government of Guatemala recently announced that the presidential and parliamentary elections which had been scheduled to take place in July 1985 were being postponed until October 1985.

¹On 9 May 1985 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the trade embargo.