



NATO Foundation
Defense College

Emerging Challenges September 2016

Todos por la paz

The 24th of August, after 52 years of conflict and four years of peace negotiations, Colombia's government and the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have signed a historic peace deal under the auspices of Cuba, Chile, Norway, Venezuela and the UN. CELAC and UNASUR facilitated the negotiations, while OSA preferred to remain in the background.

The government led by Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC finally declared a definitive bilateral ceasefire and an end to all hostilities: no one is a winner. It will last 6 months and it will be necessary to facilitate the FARC's disarmament under UN supervision and their gradual transition to civil or political life. Negotiators have also established 23 transitional communal areas, called (Zonas Veredales Transitorias de Normalización - ZVTN), to which guerrillas must withdraw during normalisation and disarmament.

Some critics complain that four years of negotiations have distracted Santos from daily issues but, most of all, from the economic problems of the country. While the economy grew by 4,4 % in 2014, this year it's probably going to grow only by 2,5 % (IMF) and the majority of the population remains very poor.

Another issue is that a percentage of FARC renegades may be recruited by ELN (National Liberation Army), a minor guerrilla movement that is still not negotiating, or worse by drug cartels. Historically around 10% of the right wing death squadrons (called AUC) have created criminal gangs (Bacrim) that complicate today the organised crime picture of the country. Moreover the next presidential candidate in 2018, vice-president Germán Vargas Lleras, was absent during the peace negotiations. This politician is known for his strong right wing positions and for his dissent from peace negotiations: perhaps he wants to protect his electoral potential by disassociating himself from the process.

Winning the referendum will not be easy because scepticism is widespread and president Santo's popularity is actually low. The consultation will take place the 2nd of October and in the meantime the leaders of the FARC will now move to the ZVTN to convince commanders to lay down their weapons. This peace is critical because the past half century of civil war, is the logical continuation of an infernal cycle of violence that started in 1899 and continued practically without major interruption since today.