

A glance at EU - Latin America relations



Special Edition: Challenges and opportunities for democracy and human rights in Central America

December 2016

Central America is a region in the midst of transformation. On the one hand, there some progress has been made in economic terms and there is relative political stability. New urban social movements have recently emerged and mobilised against corruption and impunity. At the same time, a number of challenges remain, including the fulfillment of human rights, the reduction of inequalities and access to decent employment.

The European Union has supported various initiatives and processes in the region, both politically and financially. However, the EU is also in the midst of multiple crises (economic, social and democratic), leading to a number of debates and changes to its foreign policy (including on issues such as cooperation, defence and security) and changes to its vision and role in a world in constant change. In this context, what more can the European Union do to support the opportunities in the region and at the same time address ongoing challenges, in order to both move forward in building democratic societies and institutions and also to promote democracy and full respect for and compliance with human rights?

In this issue, ACT Alliance EU and CIFCA **would like to contribute to this debate. To this end, we have included four articles on the subject.** Firstly, you will find an article referring to a Political Debate that was held in Brussels on October 18 2016, which was attended by

Events

- **1 and 2 December 2016:** EU-NGO Human Rights Forum: "United against all forms of torture"
- **29 January 2017:** NGO meeting with officials from EU Delegations
- **March 2017:** EUROLAT and OSC Event (subject to be confirmed)
- **May / June 2017:** Civil Society Forum of the EU-Central America Association Agreement Meeting and meeting of the Advisory Groups (place to be defined)
- **October / November 2017:** 3rd EU-CELAC Summit in El Salvador

Resources

- **Advocacy Toolkit towards the EU on Central America** (available in Spanish)
- **Advocacy Toolkit Website** (only in Spanish)
- Systematisation Report on how we monitor EU policies. Available in **Spanish** and **English**

the Networks, a high-level representative from the European External Action Service and ACT EU and CIFCA's members. The second article discusses the vision of democracy and human rights in Central America from within the region itself. The third article presents the issue in light of the changing European context and reflects what the EU contribution may be. Finally, we have included a visual tool that addresses the context of citizen security in the region.

- Video about security in Central America. Available in [Spanish](#), [English](#) and [french](#)

We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter



Policy Dialogue: Democracy and Human Rights in Central America. Challenges and Opportunities

On October 18, ACT Alliance EU and CIFCA networks organised a Policy Dialogue on “Democracy and Human Rights in Central America: Challenges and Opportunities”.

The event brought together representatives of European institutions and civil society organisations, resulting in a rich exchange of views on how to address issues of democracy and human rights in the region.

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Democracy and human rights in Central America, a viewpoint from the region

Based on the presentation made by Reina Rivera (Director of Diakonia Honduras) during the Policy Dialogue organized by the ACT EU and CIFCA, this article aims to present the current context of Central America, from the economic, political and social point of view. It also intends to present the main challenges this region still faces, from the human rights approach.

It also highlights some positive initiatives by the international community to make good progress and gives some recommendations on what else can be done to address the challenges observed.

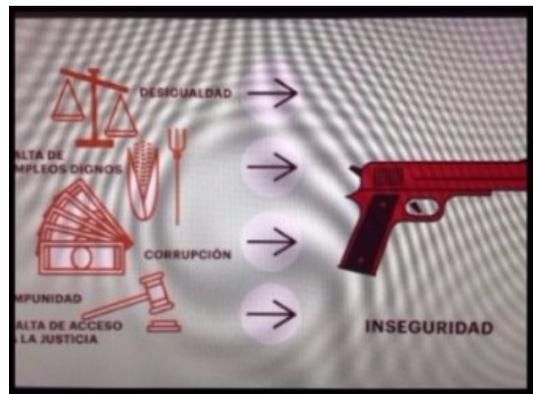
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The EU's support to Central America in a context of change

This article is based on the presentations of ACT EU Alliance and CIFCA representatives during the Policy Dialogue. They presented the current context in the European Union, where several crisis are leading to new directives and orientations of European external policies (including development cooperation and investment). They also highlighted the importance of a political dialogue that prioritizes human rights in Central America.

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Animated video: Views on citizen security in Central America

Insecurity and violence in Central America are central to the concerns of citizens, civil society organisations and governments in the region, and the international community.

In this article, we present a video introducing the main data and debates around the issue of citizen insecurity that will be launched very soon.

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Policy Dialogue: Democracy and Human Rights in Central America. Challenges and Opportunities

On October 18, the ACT Alliance EU and CIFCA networks organised a Policy Dialogue on “Democracy and Human Rights in Central America, Challenges and Opportunities”. The event brought together representatives of European institutions and civil society organisations, resulting in a rich exchange of views on how to address issues of democracy and human rights in the region.

The panel of speakers included representatives of the ACT Alliance EU and CIFCA networks and the European External Action Service. Reina Rivera, Director of DIAKONIA Honduras, analysed the current context in Central America and the main challenges in the region. ACT EU Director Floris Faber highlighted how changes in EU foreign policy could affect the EU’s role in the region, in particular development cooperation, the role of the private sector and citizen security. Susanna Daag, Executive Secretary of CIFCA, highlighted the importance of political dialogue to ensure that human rights are at the centre of EU policies on Central America. The following articles give more details of these talks.

Roland Schäfer, Deputy Director of the Americas Department in the European External Action Service, also presented the EU vision on Central America. He stressed that human rights are at the heart of EU policies. For example, the [EU’s Global Strategy](#) describes the way in which the European Union is committed to Human Rights. One of the central issues that the EU is working on with Central America is citizen security. In order to eradicate problems related to this issue, it is necessary to adopt a multiple approach strategy, as well as supporting a variety of policies and actions.

The EU sees several opportunities in the current context, such as a strong civil society that monitors and expresses its concern about the democratic situation in some of the Central American countries, and secondly, the strong rejection of corruption. As part of the fight against impunity, the EU supports institutions such as CICIG in Guatemala and MACCIH in Honduras. There are some ongoing challenges which also need to be addressed, such as the need to create economic opportunities for the Central American population.

Finally, he emphasised that the European Union not only helps build bridges between civil society and governments, but also supports the implementation of the citizen security strategy through international

advocacy.

After the talks, members of the networks and other event participants took part in an interesting debate in which different visions and positions were exchanged with the panellists, offering viewpoints from Central America, Brussels and other European capitals.

For more information, see the minutes of the [event](#) sent to participants and members of the networks following [this link](#).

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Democracy and human rights in Central America, a viewpoint from the region

(Based on the presentation of Reina Rivera, Director of Diakonia Honduras)

Despite some signs of economic progress in Central America, the situation of human rights and democracy in the region is alarming. High levels of poverty and inequality, impunity and corruption, and the presence of drug trafficking are very serious problems. Another major challenge is the issue of violence that makes this the most violent region in the world and the responses of governments and other actors, such as for example in Honduras, where military spending has been increased.

At the same time, it is important to stress the impact of megaprojects and extractive industries. This phenomenon is closely related to an increase in criminalisation and killings of human rights defenders. Moreover, there is an increasing closure of civil society spaces.

Moreover, there has been an increase in the concession of natural resources to extractive companies: in 2013, 14% of the Central American territory (some 32.4 million hectares) was under concession. In Honduras this represents 35% of the national territory, in Guatemala 30% and in Nicaragua 13.5%.

From 2012 to 2014 there were 1,688 attacks on women human rights defenders in the northern triangle, with Honduras the most dangerous country for environmental defenders in terms of per capita

killings. At the same time, 68% of the 69 public statements on Central America issued by the IACHR (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights) in the period from 2009 to 2014 were related to limitations on freedom of expression.

The main challenges facing Central America include: reducing the gaps between the more dynamic and developed south of Central America and the centre-north (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua) which continues to show persistent economic, social and political disadvantage; prioritising poverty reduction and social exclusion; strengthening justice systems, especially their independence so that they can function as a balance against abuses in the exercise of power; and corruption and unchecked presidentialism. Investments promoting energy generation from renewable sources are having a strong impact in the region. It is essential to minimise environmental impacts and comply with legal restrictions for the development of energy projects in protected areas or where the livelihoods of communities, particularly in indigenous territories, are affected directly or indirectly.

In spite of the existing challenges, current good practice should be continued and strengthened, such as the implementation of the Road Map for dialogue with civil society, consultations with civil society for the design of multi-year indicative programs, the creation of the Grupo Enlace and the Filter Group in Honduras and Guatemala respectively for dialogue regarding the protection of human rights defenders, and the financing of independent bodies such as CICIG, MACCIH and the IACHR.

Finally, civil society can play a significant role in ongoing work around these issues and in supporting the struggle for human rights guarantees. It is imperative that militarisation should not continue to be used to repress active civil society groups that report abuses and mobilise for change, and at the same time current spaces for civil society must be guaranteed in order to increase political dialogue and cooperation with the State, thereby reducing the veto power of economic groups that exert a negative influence on public policies.

The full presentation can be found [by following this link](#) .

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EU support for Central America in a context of changes

(Based on the presentations of Floris Faber (ACT Alliance EU) and Susanna Daag (CIFCA))

Floris Faber shared an analysis of new directives and directions in European foreign policy and development cooperation strategies in the region. Although the EU's commitment has been renewed until 2020, there has been some reorientation and new modalities have been included. Civil society has several concerns about the new EU Global Defence and Security Strategy and the reform of the European Consensus on Development, in particular in terms of the promotion of private sector investment as a major tool for development and the securitisation of cooperation.

Mr Faber reiterated the demands of civil society for guarantees that new political visions of development will not weaken the EU's existing commitments to Central America, that the importance of dialogue and cooperation with states in the region will be reiterated as regards democracy and human rights, and finally that all policies and programs address the structural causes of poverty and inequality by promoting respect for human rights and gender policies.

When promoting the private investment sector, the EU must ensure that investment is targeted at poverty reduction and human rights and that it respects free and informed consent for local communities. With regards to the securitisation of development cooperation, Mr Faber reminded the EU of the commitments adopted in its Strategy and Plan of Action on Citizen Security in Central America. In order to be a more effective actor, the EU must establish dialogue with civil society and human rights defenders in the region and move forward from a project and program approach towards political and strategic dialogue with governments and other partners.

For her part, Susanna Daag stressed the importance of combining development cooperation policies with political dialogue, giving priority to human rights. She mentioned two examples where the EU can play a key role through political dialogue - in the areas of citizen security and human rights defenders – and emphasised the importance of using not only silent, but also public, diplomacy. She highlighted the need to combat the causes of violence and insecurity and the inclusion of civil society as a strategic partner in the Strategy and Plan of Action on citizen security. Ms Daag also recommended that the EU continue to support human rights defenders through public statements and visits to their places of work, as well as strengthening the capacity of EU delegations to protect defenders.

In conclusion, Ms Daag reminded the EU that these initiatives cannot produce results unless coherence is guaranteed throughout development policies, European companies' responsibility to respect and

of human rights violations.

*The **full presentations** can be found at this link*

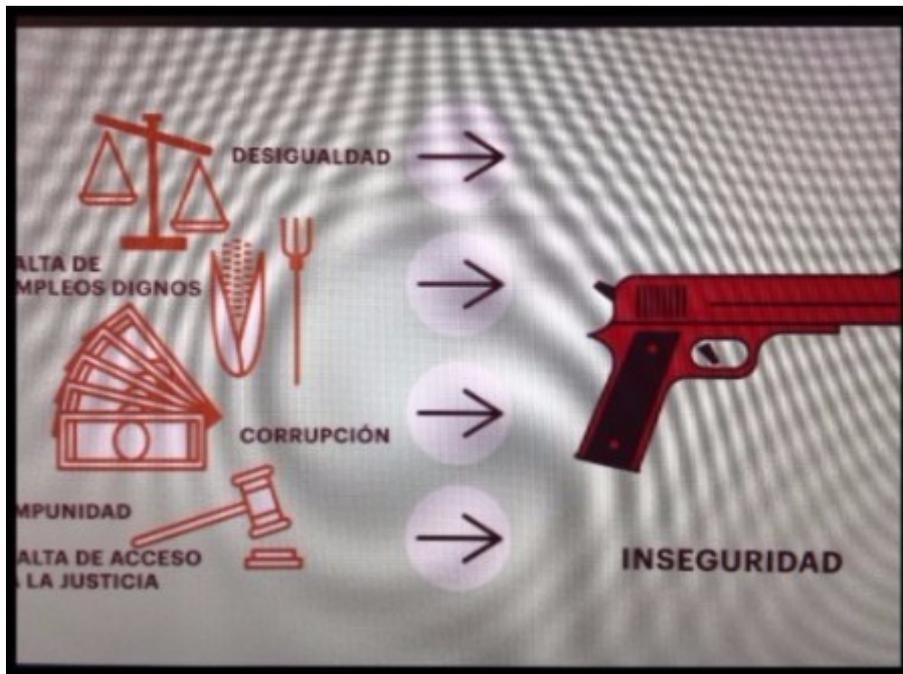
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Animated video: Views on citizen security in Central America

Insecurity and violence in Central America are central to the concerns of citizens, civil society organisations and governments in the region, and the international community. In fact, in recent years, Central American states have made progress in the formulation of the Citizen Security Strategy (ESCA), supported by the EU and other states. At the same time, both the United States and the EU have promoted policies and strategies to address this problem: the Partnership for Prosperity and the EU Strategy and Action Plan on Citizen Security for Central America and the Caribbean.

With the aim of making the public aware of this issue, the networks have prepared an animated video where some information about the context of violence and insecurity in the region is presented, the need to approach this in a comprehensive way and make explicit its roots in deeper problems that must also be solved (poverty, inequality, corruption, impunity, etc.). The video also makes a number of recommendations to the European Union.

In particular, the video will be broadcast during the months before and after the 3rd Summit of Heads of

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