EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF PLAN COLOMBIA: A VIRTUAL CONTRIBUTION TO A VIRTUAL WAR AND PEACE PLAN?

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FOREWORD

This is another in the special series of monographs emanating from the February 2001 conference on *Plan Colombia* co-sponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College and The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami. In this monograph, Joaquin Roy provides a European view of *Plan Colombia*.

Professor Roy, a Spaniard with valuable sources throughout Europe, notes that Europeans apparently do not approve of the seeming U.S. emphasis on providing military equipment and training to Colombia for a counternarcotics effort in what they see as a larger strategic political conflict. At the same time, he reports that Europeans are not only concerned with the counternarcotics violence in Colombia, but also with the economic, security, and political spillover effects for neighboring countries. Finally and logically, Roy reflects the European concern that whatever contribution might be made to *Plan Colombia* will likely be lost in the violence of a U.S.-led counternarcotics campaign.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to join with the North-South Center in offering this monograph as a contribution to the international security debate on Colombia. It is of critical importance to the vital interests of the United States, Colombia, the hemisphere, and the global community.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

PREFACE

A necessary part of the study of *Plan Colombia* by the U.S. Army War College and the Dante B. Fascell North-South Center is the presentation of the European viewpoint concerning the Colombian dilemma. Professor Joaquin Roy of the University of Miami has synthesized for us the many facets of this complicated topic. In preparing this monograph, he combed through his excellent contacts in Brussels and in the major foreign ministries of the EU, as well as in hundreds of pages written on the subject. There is, in this valuable essay, a great deal of background and "off the record" opinion he has gleaned from European policymakers.

It is often said that there is not just one *Plan Colombia* but, like the elephant to the blind men in the fable, it has several versions. I do not necessarily agree with this view, but different actors certainly have different points of emphasis. Of the $7.5 billion which Colombia has assigned to the plan, the $1.3 billion to be provided by the United States certainly emphasizes military equipment and training and counternarcotics, though not exclusively. Europe does not buy into that policy and is pessimistic as to the plan's potential success.

The European Union is committed to provide $1 billion for economic and social programs, but the money is not flowing and there is considerable ambivalence among the member states in the European Parliament (which has taken an outright anti-*Plan Colombia* stance) and among different European politicians. In fact, Roy tells us, most Europeans do not like to express support for a *Plan Colombia* at all, seeing it as a U.S. military program, but prefer to say they are helping the "Peace Process."

Even that sort of help is not without its skeptics, hence the subtitle to this monograph. Europe's "virtual

contribution," many there feel, means that its aid will be dissipated in the violent solutions which come out of U.S. policy, perhaps devolving to mere humanitarian help to a wrecked country.

What does Europe favor? Roy says that primary emphasis is on negotiation generally, but in Europe, as in the United States, there is a "struggle to design a joint [European] policy." Some countries are more interested in Colombia than others, clearly. Spain, in particular, has a huge economic stake in the region because of its investments; they are not much in Colombia but at risk in countries to which the Colombian violence could spill over. France, on the other hand, is a major investor in Colombia itself.

Where is the European Union's position headed? Will Europe continue to dither and debate within itself? Roy believes that will be determined by the United States. Europe's role, he predicts, "could be enhanced and accorded more impetus" if the new Bush Administration adopts what Europeans see as "a more cautious policy" and a reorientation of the U.S. policy mix away from what they see as only a militaristic thrust. That could ultimately lead to a more productive U.S.-European partnership.

Ambler H. Moss, Jr., Director
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

JOAQUIN ROY is a professor at the School of International Studies and senior research associate at the North-South Center of the University of Miami. He received his law degree from the University of Barcelona and his doctorate from Georgetown University. He was previously on the faculty of the School of International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University and of Emory University. His research and teaching areas are the history of political ideas, Latin American thought, intellectual history and literature, contemporary ideologies, regional integration, transitions to democracy, and human rights policies. His regional focus is on Cuba, Argentina, Spain, Central America, the European Union, and European-Latin American relations. His articles and reviews have been published in *Revista Iberoamericana, Journal of Interamerican Studies, Revista Espanola de Derecho Comunitario, Revista de Estudios Internacionales, Politica Exterior,* and *The European Union Review*. Among his 25 books are *Cuba y Espana: Relaciones y Percepciones* (Madrid BCC, 1988); *The Reconstruction of Central America: The Role of the European Community* (North-South Center, 1991); *The Ibero-American Space/El Espacio Iberoamericano* (University of Miami/University of Barcelona, 1996); *Memorias de mi Juventud en Cuba durante la Guerra Separatista* (Barcelona: Peninsula, 1999); *La Siempre Fiel: Un Siglo de Relaciones Hispano-Cubanas, 1898-1998* (University of Madrid, 1999); and *Cuba, the U.S. and the Helms-Burton Doctrine* (University of Florida Press, 2000).

EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF PLAN COLOMBIA: A VIRTUAL CONTRIBUTION TO A VIRTUAL WAR AND PEACE PLAN?

Introduction.

With the deadline of January 31, 2001, approaching, Colombian President Andres Pastrana agonized over the painful choice between negotiating with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and unleashing the army against the FARC-controlled demilitarized zone (DMZ) after months of obtaining few concessions in return. Simultaneously, the Colombian government agreed on the details of a safe zone to be awarded to the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) under the pressure and mediation of the international community. Also during this period, the European Parliament (under a Conservative-Christian Democratic majority) passed a resolution with 474 votes in favor and only one against (with 33 abstentions) opposing *Plan Colombia*, which was perceived in Europe as inspired by the United States with "militaristic" and counterinsurgency purposes, and as having the dangerous potential for spillover to other Andean neighbors. In contrast, in order to demonstrate European support for the Colombian people, a European Union (EU)-sponsored team of experts arrived in Bogotá to evaluate social and economic assistance projects to be funded by the EU and member states. The ambassadors of the 15 member states accredited in Bogotá sent an energetic appeal to all parties in the Colombian crisis to resume the negotiations towards a lasting peace.

This cloudy and contradictory scenario shows us that the prospects for a positive European involvement in resolving a fraction of the endemic Colombian conflict are quite problematic. In spite of the heartening declarations issued

by the EU and key state actors and the commitment made to the Colombian government, the deterioration of the situation in 2000 contributed to an increasingly pessimistic view. This negative assessment applies equally to the domestic evolution of the conflict and to the prospects of a European contribution to remedy the damage and obtain a lasting peace, either through *Plan Colombia* or through a separate aid package. European and U.S. perceptions of the Colombian problems and their causes have been too much apart. A give-and-take approach between Europe and the United States and mutual negotiation in identifying the priorities are the keys for still possible (but difficult) trans-Atlantic cooperation.

Although an early 2000 diagnosis might have been more optimistic based on the favorable predisposition of European actors to help Colombia, by the time the year came to an end, the panorama had clouded. The long-sought European involvement in Colombia seems to oscillate between two extremes. On the optimistic side, Europe is committed to supply the necessary political support for the task of bringing a lasting peace to Colombia by contributing some $1 billion for social and economic programs. On the pessimistic side, off-the-record voices warn that Europe "will deliver a virtual contribution to a virtual peace plan," unless the United States refurbishes certain controversial parts of the plan. Several factors have contributed to this contradictory stance.

Plan Colombia from the European Perspective.

The negative European perception became more explicit once certain details regarding a potential military involvement by the United States were announced and disseminated to the general public in August 2000 during President William Clinton's unprecedented short visit to Cartagena de Indias. Publicized analysis of the anti-drug-trafficking efforts in the absence of sufficient attention to social matters further damaged the already

critical popular evaluation in Europe of what, until that moment, was almost the exclusive domain of governments and specialists.

Ironically, U.S. foreign policy is the factor that very often provokes cohesiveness in the European view. All it takes is for the United States to offer the Europeans an easy target to serve as an excuse. In this case, it was *Plan Colombia*. It speedily triggered an impressive show of coherence to demonstrate an independent view. Two other conditions are necessary to evoke this phenomenon. The first is that the policy selected to become an occasion for discord be contestable at little cost to European governments or organizations. The second is that European resistance coincide with some measure of U.S. domestic opposition to the policy proposed or implemented. The American home front then becomes a European ally.

In other words, the agenda items that are the subject of disagreement are not to be of a highly threatening and global nature. They must not constitute a serious threat to any of the new fundamental European security concerns (energy, migration, radical nationalism) or the special issues affecting any of the member states. In this scenario, an ad hoc European opposition platform would fall apart at the first instant when the national interest of one of the European partners was seen at risk. Europeans also need to have allies in the U.S. home front, either in public opinion, partisan politics, think tanks, or the academic community. *Plan Colombia* fits perfectly. Regarding political and economic cost, it's quite innocuous. The site is regionally localized. It is already opposed in important parts of the U.S. home front, especially the columns of conservative writers. If Colombia's Latin American neighbors are also in disagreement with the U.S. policy, that is an additional bonus.

However, it is also understandable that an issue as complex as the Colombian crisis is the subject of internal debate among the leadership of the EU institutions and the

core of tactical disagreements between some member states. The negative perception in Europe is not monolithic. Some European sectors and governments are more prone to express unconditional support than others. These others are freer to vent their concern and irritation over some of the most controversial aspects of the plan or its various interpretations. As a general rule, most of the member states are skeptical concerning a proposal they perceive as U.S.-inspired. At the same time, they experience difficulty warming to a proposal that borders on intruding in the internal affairs of another country. Although European officials are usually guarded in their public declarations concerning responsibility, in the privacy of their own minds, they feel the conflict could best be resolved solely by Colombians themselves. Government corruption, social injustice, and the abandonment of state obligations are perceived as the causes of the crisis. Thus, while on one hand they oppose the rationale of the military-security strategy pursued by the United States, on the other they struggle to design a joint policy.

Once the details of U.S. backing were more explicitly known, the reaction in Europe could be described as a one-two movement of arms and hands, a sort of warm-up exercise. First the Europeans lifted their arms and shielded their heads in disbelief and fear. Second, they positioned their hands in their pockets trying to secure their purses and wallets. They felt they were being asked to pay for what could be described as big "incidentals," with some becoming even larger than the core projects, for example, some of those constructions projects where the original modest budget balloons to stratospheric heights. Moreover, additional European financial help would be needed once all the Colombian military hardware and munitions were exhausted and the last drop of blood of the last Colombian soldier was expended.

In sum, Europeans perceived that they were being called upon to pay the expenses of a war they did not perpetrate, did not expand, and did not mess up. For decades, U.S.

involvement in some parts of the world, most especially in some regions of Latin America, has been aptly described as resembling that of a well-intentioned elephant. Like an elephant, the United States tries to maintain an impossibly low profile, anchors itself to the terrain with slow, clumsy movements, and inadvertently knocks down the circus tent pole with tragic consequences. In European eyes, *Plan Colombia* seemed to fit this scenario.

Contributing to this European perception has been the many successive versions and interpretations of *Plan Colombia* officially announced by the Colombian government.[1] Apparently not happy with the two complementary approaches developed by Bogotá and Washington to sell the same product to two different audiences (basically, the Colombian population and the U.S. Congress), Colombian authorities eagerly responded to European concerns over the original plan by inviting Brussels to propose a "special plan for Colombia," an invitation the Europeans were ready to take. This was exactly what happened on May 19, 2000, when Colombian Foreign Minister Fernández de Soto met with EU External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, who pointed out that the Commission's concerns centered on the military component, the lack of involvement of all the parties in dispute, the failure to properly address human rights issues, and land reform and taxation problems.[2] Avoidance of the label *Plan Colombia* became part of the European tack, with use of the term "Peace Process" becoming the preferred alternative.

Having expressed these concerns, however, Patten did take the lead in pursuing a constructive European response to Colombian needs. Furthermore, he spoke out candidly—even bluntly—when some of the member states dragged their feet in offering contributions and support:

> I am . . . concerned that some member states want to disassociate European support from Plan Colombia. I fully understand, and even share to some extent, the criticisms of

> Plan Colombia. But it would send a worrisome political signal if we granted the EU aid to projects which did not fit under the Plan.[3]

Patten stated to Fernández de Soto that the Commission intended "to do everything in its power to continue the process" and proposed to the "member states that a European aid programme for Colombia be set up." He offered the services of the Commission to coordinate this joint effort. The record shows that this task was accomplished.

The governments of the several influential members of the EU (because of their historical linkages with Colombia, or because of the volume of their aid programs to Latin America, or both), and also the governments of countries outside the Union (e.g., Norway, Switzerland) have expressed considerable concern over the Colombian crisis. They have also, under varying terms and conditions, pledged considerable resources. Not since Vietnam and the bloody clashes in Central America has Europe pondered involvment in a conflict that erupted after the Cold War's end. The sense of urgency in cooperating to solve the pressing problems of Colombia has been felt by all the influential European governments and multi-state organizations, virtually without exception. The narco-trafficking dimensions have doubtless contributed greatly to this interest. Europe is suffering as much as the United States from the consequences of the trade and consumption of drugs. We should note that not all EU member countries have been equally stalwart on Colombia's behalf. Spain, with its obvious historical, cultural, and language affinities with South America, has been qualifiedly supportive, while such member countries as France and Germany have shown distinct signs of ambivalence. Still others have remained vaguely noncommittal.

The Attitude of the European Commission.

Colombia has been of priority concern to the Commission. Patten has played a difficult role in entertaining complaints of the critical member states (and the European Parliament) over *Plan Colombia*, welcoming the cooperation of others, especially the Spanish government, and at the same time refraining from irritating the U.S. Government unnecessarily. The European Commission's view concerning Colombia and the justification for European involvement have been lucidly stated by Patten himself.

Despite the typical disclaimers disassociating his publicly stated views from those of the Commission (they are the same), Patten pledged maximum support for the main protagonists of the peace process: Colombia and the Andean states. The process, in his view, needs a regional focus, to be originated in the region in a balanced and integrated fashion, because the problems are larger and more complex than the domains defined by national borders. The main challenges are the violations of human rights, the lack of respect for the rule of law, and the deterioration of the role of the state caused by drug trafficking. Europe not only has an interest at stake, but also a responsibility. However, in spite of some signs of progress, Patten is realistic concerning the endemic conditions that require a deeper structural response. Violence is not only a cause of problems, it is also the consequence of the prevalent situation of the country. That is why the EU Commission has to denounce the violations of human rights, demanding punishment of the violators, whoever they are.

Trying to match words with deeds, Patten pledged a concrete financial contribution toward the peace process in addition to standard humanitarian aid, with the contribution amounting to about U.S. $300 million. Three areas will receive priority in apportioning aid: the

promotion and defense of human rights, the reduction of the socio-economic disparities, and institutional reinforcement.

When European observers of the new situation recall precedents of European involvement in Latin America along with corresponding disagreement with the United States, the clash over *Plan Colombia* may remind them of how they dealt with a problematic Cuba after the Cold War, especially as regarded U.S. extraterritorial laws such as Helms-Burton. However, the European approach in this case seems much better paralleled by Europe's balanced analytical treatment of the Central American confrontations in the 1980s, an approach the Europeans view as having been a success. The San José process, based on the conviction that the conflict was caused by social inequality and not by Soviet-Cuban involvement, is the model that seems to be at the heart of Plan Colombia II (the European view). Peace in Colombia is thus to be regarded as an enterprise calling for regional Latin American dimensions in need of contributions "by many people in many countries," which former Costa Rican president Oscar Arias called for in his 1987 Nobel Peace Prize speech regarding his efforts to bring peace to Central America. In any event, such considerations are reflected in the official declarations of the European Commission.[4]

In an effort to build a base for identifying feasible concrete lines of EU-sponsored projects, the Latin American group of the permanent representatives of the member states (REPER) agreed on a series of "principles":

- recognition of the Colombian civil society and local communities as fundamental actors;
- an understanding that the Colombian government needs to contribute financially to the projects;
- non-intervention of armed groups in the regions identified for EU activity;

- neutrality and transparency in all EU-sponsored programs;
- a close relationship with national programs; and,
- an expectation that the success of programs will not be possible without an impeccable respect for human rights and the liberalization of the redistribution scheme for wealth and resources.

EU activities should occur in a wider context of international assistance, most especially in the fight against drug production and trafficking. Massive utilization of the crop eradicator fusarium axysporum should be banned. The EU should use its diplomacy in the fight against chemical products used as a base for drug production. It should strive for the intensification of inter-regional cooperation in drug trafficking control, and it should assist in the fight against money laundering. Some specific regions of Colombia are identified as a priority: the Choco, the Macizo colombiano, the South (Putumayo, Caqueta, Narino), the Magdalena medio, and the Cartagena del Caira.[5]

However, there remains the worrisome Janus-faced gulf between what Europe says publicly and what it says off the record. On one hand, governments maintaining a cordial relationship with the Colombian government are careful not to portray in public what in private they consider to be an alarming picture. In private they describe the situation as structurally endemic. They do not consider it simply a conflict between government and guerrillas—a cops and robbers scenario in the tropics—but rather the convulsions of a society which is terminally fractured. This double discourse also applies to commentaries on an apparent agreement between the United States and Europe.

When engaged in informal, off-the-record conversations, European officials tend to be forthcoming and clear. European governments and organizations have the

impression that on their side of the ocean they are being called on to underwrite solutions for social and economic problems, while on the other side of the ocean the problem is reduced rather to one of drug-trafficking and security. As a commentary on the section of *Plan Colombia* dealing with the financial contribution of the international community,[6] one senior diplomat characterized it as "*poner la pasta*" (shell the dough). In crude terms never present in documents or veiled declarations, there is the prevailing European impression that the Colombians will contribute the dead, the Americans will supply the military hardware, and the Europeans will contribute the money to defray the cost of the social and environmental damage caused by the other two parties. That is to say, European assistance is perceived in different European circles as a sort of remedy once the implementation of the U.S.-led military plan is terminated. An alert observer detects this feeling shared by many European diplomats in Madrid, Paris, and Brussels in corridors and after-hours meetings.

The Specificity of Spain.

The perception of Spain with regard to the Colombian crisis reflects a mix of two contrasting attitudes. On one hand, *Plan Colombia* generated a very critical reaction in Spanish public opinion, in the nongovernment organization (NGO) network, and in the think-tank and academic communities. While ideological lines might have been expected to appear in the analysis of conflict where Marxist-leaning guerrillas were involved, especially as regards the critical view of the Spanish conservative press, no such division has occurred in the case of *Plan Colombia*. On the other hand, one notes the publicly expressed enthusiasm of the Spanish government for the plan, along with political support and funds. This apparent contradiction would make Spain an exception to the rule of general disapproval of *Plan Colombia* in Europe. However, this can be explained on two grounds. First, as far as the Spanish government is concerned, the double discourse was

activated because it permitted an effective public relations campaign vis-à-vis the Colombian and the U.S. governments simultaneously. However, while public declarations are respectful of the Colombian government and all sides in conflict, in private the view is as harsh as the one shown by the rest of the Europeans.

The second explanation for the apparent generosity of the Spanish government's pledge lies in the historical and cultural commitment of Spain towards the development and democratization of Latin American. Of less moment but worthy of mention, witty observers also point to *apuntarse a todo* (the syndrome of signing up for everything). This syndrome still affects Spain after decades (if not centuries) of isolation. It works in a way similar to that of the European gut reaction to grab an issue to oppose the United States in order to register independence from the overwhelming presence of the one and only superpower. In search for issues to show its international presence, membership, and involvement, Spain is the opposite of an isolationist middle power. Colombia is an ideal issue for this purpose. The novelty in the last part of the 20th century is that Spain returned to the Americas in a fashion similar to the one epitomized by the galleons in the times of colonial conquest.

Spain has become the leader of European investment in Latin America. Although Spanish investment in Colombia is not as high as in Argentina or Chile, the spillover effect of the Colombian crisis has alarmed Spanish investors and consequently has propelled the Spanish government to act accordingly. Damaged by its political crisis, Colombia ranks as the second worst Latin American economy in a survey of Spanish firms, based on efficiency of public administration, economic and business prospects, business community efficiency, and environment for business.

It is broadly recognized that the diplomatic establishment of Spain has several ideological profiles. The conservative view that dominated the ranks of the Spanish

foreign service in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s has been pushed aside by a more liberal and left-leaning attitude towards the world's problems, one seen as a better way to protect the national interests of Spain. In contrast with some European countries, a critical view of U.S. foreign policy is not the monopoly of the Spanish left, but also a natural attitude of the right since the defeat in 1898 over the American intervention in Cuba. When it comes to the U.S. policy in Latin America and its link with reactionary governments in the area, the Spanish diplomatic service today is very critical. The Colombian crisis has served to consolidate both lines of thought.

In general terms, the view of a notable number of Spanish diplomats, matching the perception of NGOs, academics, and news media, includes a picture of a broken Colombian state, lacking legitimacy and territorial control, unrecognized by a society that demands justice. Among the urgent structural problems that need to be addressed are the culture of discrimination and social exclusion, a persistent armed conflict that equals a civil war, a society plagued by common crime, a will to modernize without democracy, an endemic absence of justice and respect for the law, and the overwhelming presence of narco-trafficking culture. The result of all this is that politics are rejected as an undesirable activity. *Plan Colombia*, in this view, fails to answer a central question: is it exclusively geared to terminate the drug-trafficking activity, or is it proposed to address other issues?

The future of the Colombia crisis would seem to embrace three possibilities: an improbable victory of one of the parties; the very plausible continuation of the conflict; and a process of political negotiation, a course that seems more hopeful in the medium term. However, the Colombian government should be warned that it would have to be careful in negotiating with the guerrillas; accomplishing peace necessitates that the opponents come out under terms guaranteeing their peaceable and constructive reintegration into society. Harsh terms of surrender and

sudden demobilization are to be avoided if the objective is a solid negotiation between the government and all sectors of the society on one side, and the insurgent groups on the other. This negotiation should include all the pending issues plaguing Colombian society: the agrarian problem, the management of energy resources, political representation, social policy, regional powers, the role of the police and military, and protection of the population.

The diplomatic view as summarized above is also the most realistic. A short-term solution is not possible. Construction of a truly democratic government will not be feasible if important sectors of society are excluded. All sides have to cooperate to counteract historical inertia where a government is floundering, lacking credibility and territorial control. The challenge is to create nothing less than a new state.

In answer to President Pastrana's petition for international cooperation, Spain's diplomats are doubly concerned. On one hand they take note of the critical approach of their colleagues from the EU's member states who have a different sensibility for Latin American issues. On the other, they see that Spain may appear isolated once the critical sectors manage to swing the general attitude. *Plan Colombia* is perceived as imprecise, militaristic, and dictated by the United States. Spain's diplomats suggest that the Colombian government should be persuaded to delay the selling and implementation of the plan, deleting all items that have to do with the fight against drugs or the eradication of illegal crops. As a substitute, Colombia is invited to present another *plan* composed almost exclusively of projects for social and economic development, agrarian reform, improvement of justice, and the fight against corruption.[7]

When focussed on economic support, however, the picture becomes murkier. Observers are well advised to scrutinize the details of the Spanish pledge in terms of funding the projects to be backed. As in other cases of

Spain's development assistance programs (not an exception in the overall European picture), the pitching of *Plan Colombia* becomes the selling of the contribution of real and virtual programs and projects. In the absence of detailed documentation, the total package (announced between U.S. $100 and $124 million) may ultimately be a composite of current projects with the addition of commercial lines of credit. Months after the frenzy of Spanish declarations and diplomatic activities, when pressed for details of the specific package to be presented in coordination with other European donors, Spanish officials stated that data and documentation were not yet available.[8]

The European Parliament Intervenes.

With the end of January 2001 approaching, the deadline for preserving the sanctuary area set aside for the FARC as an inducement for peace negotiations was looming over the heads of all protagonists. Dramatizing even further the seriousness of the moment, President Pastrana cut short his trip to Europe and returned to Bogotá under rumors of military pressure to intervene in the FARC-controlled area. At the same time, the Colombian government decided to give final approval to the details of another *despeje* (clear) zone for the benefit of the ELN. With the changing of the guard in Washington, speculation about a change of course towards Colombia abounded. Not by coincidence, the Committee of Development and Cooperation of the European Parliament took the lead and exacted a plenary session resolution from the European parliamentary body. The content of the declaration was construed in different ways according to the inclinations of the readers, and it will be the subject of study in view of the course of events in the future.

The Commission reaffirmed its position through a statement by Commissioner Poul Nielson, a Danish Social-Democrat who holds the portfolio of cooperative relations. This is a significant detail because its shows first

that the EU's interest is wider than the narrow preoccupations of one commissioner's portfolio. It shows second that the international assistance focus of the EU is now far sharper since it reflects the impact of the Baltic countries' views, marked by a stricter attitude toward accountability, self-reliance, transparency, human rights, and democratization. Reminding the audience of the EU's political and financial support for the Colombian peace initiative, Nielson expressed again the Commission's concern over the "military component" of the plan, confirmed the endorsement of the 1998 United Nations approach to the drug problem, and pledged the support of the EU institution for positive measures in drug demand reduction and the strengthening of the rule of law. He committed 115 million Euros for the period 2000-2006 and announced the arrival of EU experts to study projects in the Magdalena medio region to be underwritten with another 20 million Euros. He also confirmed the political support by the EU through the *Grupo de Paises Amigos* (Group of Friends) in promoting the negotiations regarding the *despeje* zones and in regional efforts to avoid the spillover of the conflict to other countries.

The Resolution of the Parliament was prompted by a strong stance by Portuguese Joaquim Miranda, a United Left member of the parliamentary body and president of its Cooperation and Development Committee. He first stressed that the EU could not remain indifferent to the Colombian crisis or assume "ambiguous positions." In his view, the heart of the matter was *Plan Colombia* itself. He called upon the Commission and the Council to "distance" themselves from it because of (1) its "militaristic character," (2) its lack of a "linkage process" to the Colombian society, (3) its lack of recognition of the "paramilitary phenomenon," and (4) the fact that the plan "endangers the negotiation process." He pointed out that the Council on September 9, 2000, called for a specifically European plan, and he insisted on the need to differentiate it from *Plan Colombia*, with a veiled sneer at the "only European government" (i.e., Spain)

publicly and financially committed to its support. Finally he stressed the need for drastic social and economic reforms in Colombia to redress the historical causes of the current problems.

In this context, the plenary session of the European Parliament approved by practically a unanimous margin one of the strongest declaratios ever made on the situation of a Latin American country. Besides repeating and elaborating upon the Miranda reservations and portions of the declarations made by other dissatisfied commissioners and parliamentarians, the text mandates that the EU support a peace process with the objective of reinforcing democratic institutions, alternative development, and humanitarian and social aid. NGOs and civil society should be empowered for this task. Wealth redistribution is a necessity in a system where peasants do not own the land.

In sum, the EU must implement its own "non-militaristic" strategy with "neutrality and transparency," and with the participation of civil society in the negotiation process. The Commission is urged to commit the necessary financial resources. The plan of the Council to evaluate the situation every 6 months is warmly endorsed. International cooperation against the trafficking of drug precursors and money laundering are to be part of the total package. All armed parties are enjoined to cooperate, and the neighboring countries are asked to contribute to a comprehensive regional solution. Most especially, the text of the parliamentary declaration expressed alarm over the fact that since the opening of the peace negotiations, acts of violence and terrorism (assassinations, kidnappings, massacres) had increased. According to the declaration, such acts, all undertaken with apparent impunity, accented the impotence of the population and increased their frustration. International observers (such as UN representative Mary Robinson) have certified the inadequacy of measures against the paramilitary groups, calling for a EU commitment on behalf of protecting and financing human rights organizations.[9]

Other European Institutions and Partners.

As in any other political family, there are members more inclined to show radical attitudes than others. With regard to *Plan Colombia*, some EU member states have set themselves apart by expressing sharp antagonistic views. Belgium and Germany have been leaders in insisting that the EU should distance itself from *Plan Colombia*, and that European assistance should be conditioned on certain prior acts by parties to the crisis.[10] Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Austria, and Denmark have been at the forefront of those insisting on program funding for the protection of human rights and the involvement of civil society. However, perhaps inconsistently, some members (Germany, Austria) have expressed concern over the fact that strong declarations and politically-imposed limitations may hinder the effectiveness of existing projects in Colombia, making the fresh contribution of some states problematic because they are not willing to throw good money after bad.[11] This tendency reveals the weakness of EU programs that are based upon individual national programs.

The Group of Friends is at at the center of the international involvement contributing to agreements and contacts between the Colombian factions. The group is designed with a clear strategy to reflect that it has the EU as a nucleus (Spain and France), but it also includes non-EU states that have a reputation either for being neutral (Switzerland) or for having considerable experience in serving as a bridge (Norway). Cuba is the Latin American representative, reflecting its sincere commitment to resolve the crisis since it has more to lose if problems become worse. Most of the important agreements between the Colombian government and the FARC have been crafted with the support and diplomacy offered by the Group. Members of the Group are quite critical of the attitude of the ELN, but they did make efforts to engage them in the negotiations.

The development of *Plan Colombia* involved Paris in a triple capacity. First, France was holding the presidency of

the EU during the second semester of 2000. France is also a member of the Group of Friends. Finally, France was and continues to be an influential voice in Latin American cultural and economic affairs, in which it has important interests. (French investment is the leader in Colombia.) The French government could hardly afford to miss the opportunity to strengthen its somewhat weakened position in the world after the end of the Cold War. While in some dimensions of domestic policy the influence of conservative President Jacques Chirac is present, in most avenues of foreign policy France still seems to reflect the lines of François Mitterrand. This becomes most obvious in France's attitude toward sensitive Latin American aspects of U.S. foreign policy. For example, the case of Cuba in its opposition to the extraterritorial reach of U.S. laws such as Helms-Burton as well as the case of Colombia itself gave France opportunities for involvement similar to those afforded when it led Europe in designing the Central American policies of cooperation assistance during the 1980s.

The French government was backed by its vocal pro-leftist and liberal press, led by the influential *Le Monde* and by the traditional leaning of its academics towards the causes of the marginalized. While holding the presidency of the EU, Ambassador Renaud Vignal, director of the Americas Department of the Quai D'Orsay, clearly endorsed the overall assessment of the European Commission and noted the consensus of the most vocal member states. The Peace Process, as Europe prefers to call it, emphasizes that the search for peace is the only hope that Colombia has. This is a process that needs time, patience, and a dose of compromise by all parties in the conflict. According to Vignal, there is no alternative. Echoing other European voices, he says there is no military solution that would guarantee general agreement and consequent lasting peace. He then pledged a complete package to be carried out with the cooperation of other organizations, based on the following points: support of the rule of law, defense of

human rights, opposition to the causes of violence, environmental protection, and consolidation of regional cooperation. European integration was offered as an example for gathering the contributions of neighboring states.

As a member of the Group of Friends, and most especially as a guardian of the Geneva Convention, the Swiss government has been instrumental in providing added credibility to European efforts to facilitate the peace process. In successive declarations, Switzerland has stressed the need for obtaining a lasting peace, applying whatever efforts are required. Reaffirming the views of the other European partners, Switzerland expresses among its priority concerns the observance of international human rights agreements, obtaining a general consensus among all sectors of the Colombian people, and careful attention to environmental damage. Consequently, Swiss representatives find it difficult to accept the military component of the plan and the sweeping crop eradication program. With a pledge of $12 million to be dispersed in 3 years, the Swiss say they will apply it in the following areas: assisting displaced people, protection of human rights, negotiations with the ELN, establishment of the office of the Defender of the People, and diverse support for NGOs.

Few observers can deny the important influence of Germany not only in EU affairs but in the overall global scene. Since its near total devastation in World War II, the Federal Republic of Germany has, in a quite systematic way, regained its central place in world affairs. German leadership understood the message of Robert Schuman, and, as a western federal republic and as a reunified country, it has been at the forefront of the EU presence in the world. In view of the huge German investment in Latin America and the generosity of its development assistance programs (30 percent of such EU programs), it is not surprising that the Colombian crisis has caught the attention of the German government. To sum up Germany's attitude toward *Plan Colombia*, it can be stated that it

supports the efforts of the Colombian government and people to obtain peace in the country within the framework of bilateral agreements. Germany does not want its contribution to be identified with *Plan Colombia*. It supports the peace process along with other Europeans in their own European program.[12] In the record of official EU meetings, Germany "insisted on making very clear in the text that the EU distance itself from Plan Colombia."[13] Negotiations, in this view, are the only way to obtain peace. Germany backed its words with a 50 percent increase (10 million DM) in its financial commitment to Colombia, which today totals 1.57 billion DM (almost $800 million).

One of the more vocal opponents of the U.S.-inspired version of the plan, Belgium has been a leading European exponent of the view that the causes for the Colombian crisis lie beyond guerrilla activities and drug trafficking. Pointing out the "inequality, low living standards, and failure of government to meet the [Colombian people's legitimate] demands," Brussels "diametrically opposed" the plan, proposing instead a more "integral solution" and pledging support for social programs through funds distributed by Belgian NGOs. Figures have amounted to 100 million Belgian francs in recent years, the pledge of a BF 23 million loan for conflict prevention programs, and a supplement of BF 50 million for 2001. Moreover, there are similar expectations for 2002.

Conclusion: The Needs and Prospects of European Support.

The European commitment will not falter, at least in the political and humanitarian sectors. The pressure to participate will continue for a variety of reasons. First and above all, European participation has always been welcome in Latin America, and especially in a unique crisis such as Colombia's. European contributions are seldom perceived as cases of intrusion, interference, or meddling. In fact, the precedent of European involvement in Central America

argues just the opposite. The EU's blue emblem with the 12 stars (though membership has been expanded to 15 nations) very often functions as a shield of excellence and a guarantee, in clear contrast with the ambivalence stirred by programs identified with the Stars and Stripes. Such ambivalence may be unfair, given the overall historical contribution of U.S. actors, but it simply reflects the damage inflicted by past mistakes. The mediating, facilitating, and monitoring services of the European states and agencies still comprise considerable political capital to be used in the future.

It is not surprising then that U.S. Government sources and other informed observers agree with the Colombian government that Europe is an indispensable actor. In view of the complexity of the Colombian crisis, it needs to be addressed by a multiplicity of contributors. No commentator questions the pivotal role to be played by European actors regarding international assistance to Colombia, either through their humanitarian activities delegated to NGO networks under the umbrella of the EU, or through programs directly implemented by the member states.

The role to be played by European actors would probably be enhanced and accorded more impetus if, as predicted, a more cautious U.S. policy in Colombia ensues from a re-look by the new Bush Administration. A more flexible and nuanced implementation of *Plan Colombia* may give more breathing space to European participation, freeing it from damaging preoccupations with the military component.

It may well be that the precedent of the Central American experience allows us to have hope. Granted, the end of the Cold War might have contributed more to the present Peace Process than was contributed by European pressures along the tortuous road traveled by the San José process. It is also true that the negotiations ending the bloody civil wars in Central America did not eradicate their socio-economic causes. The complexity of the Colombian

crisis and its subsequent spillover effect in the Andean region may present an insurmountable obstacle, too large to be solved by the assistance given by European-led aid. But at least an end to the mutual massacres may be an objective reasonably within reach.

Successful negotiation between the United States and its European partners growing out of an attenuation of the most irritating aspects of the original *Plan Colombia* would provide both parties a sense of accomplishment. For the U.S. Government, this might be obtained at the cost of blaming the projects of the previous administration. For the Europeans, the reduction of the military aspects of the plan may be the base for selling a more generous package of aid. A common strategy developed by the U.S. Government and the EU on pressuring the Colombian government for more effective control of the paramilitary forces may help. A greater surge of European activism backed by development assistance funds and investment nurtured by a better Colombian economic climate would provide a much needed pressure base to persuade the guerrilla factions to come to the table for real negotiations beyond ceasefires and neutral zones.

The matter may look differently as events following the talks between President Pastrana and FARC leader Manuel Marulanda play themselves out. Positive developments may ultimately occur as a result of Colombian officials meeting with the Europeans in Brussels to iron out details of the European contribution, as recommended by the team of European experts who toured Colombia to identify and evaluate projects to be funded. Nonetheless, despite such promises of substance, the Colombian scenario and its agenda are still shadowed by this candid caveat offered by a high representative of a European government: "We will make a virtual contribution to a virtual peace plan."[14] His estimate was reinforced by the declarations that led to the Resolution of the European Parliament. At the same time, however, this

pessimistic message will serve as a spur to all parties to sit down and negotiate.

ENDNOTES

1. See official web site: *http://www.presidencia.gov.co/plancolo/index.htm*.

2. Communications and interviews with EU staff.

3. Letter to Joseph Pique, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, September 19, 2000.

4. See website at *http://europa.eu.int/comm/external relations/colombia/intro/sec 1647 3.htm.*

5. Group AMLAT, "Appui de l'Union Europeenne au Processus de Paix Colombien," September 7, 2000.

6. For a complete listing of the projects presented for international financing, see http://www.presidencia.gov.co/plancolo/volumen2/doc1.htm.

7. The comments and recommendations are a summary of several conversations conducted during the months of July and September of 2000 with Spanish diplomats having direct knowledge and duties in the area, as supplemented with pertinent documentation. All arguments included were proposed, circulated, and discussed several months before the official dissemination of *Plan Colombia* and the trip of President Clinton to Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) in August 2000.

8. Information derived from European Union sources, January 2001.

9. Resolution, February 1, 2001.

10. COLAT meeting, September 26, 2000.

11. COLAT meeting, October 2, 2000.

12. Explicit declaration by German official to the author via its consulate in Miami, January 12, 2001.

13. Internal communications of the Commission, October 13, 2000.

14. From European Union sources.

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Major General Robert R. Ivany
Commandant

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