

BIGMUN 2021

COMMITTEE: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

ISSUE: The situation in Venezuela

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POSITION: President

Dear Delegates,

My name is Ata Göloğlu and I'm content to be your president chair board member at BIGMUN Online. I am a senior at TED Ankara College and this will be my first time participating in BIGMUN although I've had several chairing experiences and many more delegate experiences. As for me, I'm interested in studying languages and I like learning about other nations and their cultures. I love getting to know new people and learning about their stories. I also consider Model United Nations to have had a positive impact on my life and I believe it has been an important part of my high school experience. This committee's issues have been selected in accordance with the overall theme of the conference and each issue contains multifaceted questions and diverse implications that you will be expected to explore. This chair report contains most of the necessary background information about the issue but it is in no way a document that will automatically generate solutions. Therefore, delegates will need to share their own viewpoints and create an intricate balance of diplomacy in order to find the most suitable solution for the issue. I hope we can establish the interconnectedness required for the committee to function and most importantly, I hope every delegate has a fun experience while simultaneously improving themselves in terms of diplomacy and politics!

INTRODUCTION

The political crisis in Venezuela, which has been going on for years, has escalated and started to affect many aspects of the life of its citizens, such as financial stability. Characterized by extreme amounts of inflation, starvation, a sharp increase in poverty rates, the South American country has experienced a great amount of emigration, estimated to be around 3.4 million people in 2019.¹ The situation is the worst economic crisis in the history of Venezuela with as much as 94% percent of the population living under poverty.²

The crisis began in 2010 with ex-president Hugo Chávez declaring economic war after the rapid surge in shortages of food and other basic necessities and was aggravated by the policies implemented during the presidency of Nicolás Maduro.³ Due to Maduro's inability to control pre-existing shortages and inflation rate, Venezuela's socio economic crisis worsened. In 2014, the country had already entered a recession with its GDP falling by 3.89%. The year 2016 saw the sharpest contraction in economy and the highest inflation ever recorded in Venezuela—with a contraction of 18.6⁴ percent and an inflation rate of 800%.⁵

¹ Nichols, M.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-un/venezuelans-facing-unprecedented-challenges-many-need-aid-internal-u-n-report-idUSKCN1R92AG>

² Nichols, M.

³ Sweeney J.

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20180523_acaps_thematic_report_humanitarian_crisis_in_venezuela.pdf

⁴ *GDP growth (annual %) - Venezuela, RB.* (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2014&locations=VE&start=1960&view=chart>.

⁵ Kurmanev, A. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html>

The fact that the crisis does not only concern the country's economics but also its social dynamics as a whole has led to the attention of the United Nations among many other NGOs and foreign powers. Maduro's termination of the opposition-lead National Assembly through which he directed its powers to the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) resulted in a constitutional crisis and despite the reversal of the decision, a wave of unrest has spread among the population. The number of protesters grew as many of Maduro's decisions were considered to be political moves that would allow him and his political party to stay in power indefinitely. Coupled with the ongoing Venezuelan presidential crisis, in which the legitimate president of Venezuela cannot be determined due to the conflict between other nations' recognition, the constitution and the decision of the TSJ, the crises have turned Venezuela into a country of international concern, which could manifest itself as an opportunity for foreign powers to intervene and de-stabilize the country even more.

With two people claiming to be the legitimate president of Venezuela with at least some amount of international recognition, both international and national reactions to the events stemming from the political and economic changes are divided. As the situation consists of various, deep-rooted aspects of varying degrees of severity, the solution should not only consist of alterations to political or economic policy, but an end to the humanitarian issues such as extreme poverty and malnutrition.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

hyperinflation: quick and uncontrollable increase in general prices within an economy

economic recession: substantial decrease in GDP and economic activity in an area over a specified time period

Dutch disease: the over-dependence on a specific economic sector that is inherently related to a decline in other sectors

colectivo: irregular and armed supporters of Maduro and consequently his government and political party

OVERVIEW

Economic

Chávez introduced the Bolivarian missions in 2003 with the creation of extremely large funds due to the surge in oil prices.⁶ These missions included several goals, catering to increasing the literacy rates, bettering medical care and providing affordable food for citizens. However, his death in 2013 brought back into question the sustainability of the missions, especially considering the inefficiency in the developing governmental institutions at the time. Due to one of the worst cases of Dutch disease in the world, with the government's complete reliance⁷ on oil for income, Chávez's revolutionary approach proved to falter: instead of saving a portion of the large amounts of governmental income, he provided luxurious services for the poor and the rich alike in order to maintain his popularity among the electors.⁸

Maduro, defeating his opponent by a small margin, rose to power in 2013. Even in the beginning of his presidency, he was faced with shortages and inflation despite his attempts to continue the revolutionary approach of Chávez. Suffering from high levels of governmental corruption leading to mismanagement of debt, Venezuela's economy continued to deteriorate from 2014 until 2019 under the leadership of Maduro.⁹

Social and Humanitarian

⁶ Corrales, J. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/07/the-house-that-chavez-built/>

⁷ Corrales, J.

⁸ Corrales, J.

⁹ Briseño Ruiz, J.

https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/3123/Velden%2C_M.G.E.___%28Maurice%29_van_der_1.pdf?sequence=1

As the poverty rate continued to rise, citizens' access to healthcare, nutrition and housing decreased. The economic collapse in the country was followed by a collapse in the healthcare system that was once considered one of the best in South America.¹⁰ A report by the *Human Right Watch* in 2019 demonstrated a high infant mortality rate and a rise in the spread of preventable diseases.¹¹ The government denied any aid until 2018, when they decided to accept economic aid. Blackouts, including internet blackouts, have happened various times since 2019, affecting the ability of the medical institutions to provide adequate healthcare services.¹² The government's continued suppression on those trying to provide information, in addition to its failure to inform the international platform about the ubiquitous healthcare issues in the country, contributed to the failure of the healthcare system.¹³

The population emigrating from Venezuela due to healthcare issues also constitute various problems in neighboring countries, since in many cases those countries also may not have enough supplies to provide sufficient support.

Venezuela's ability to depend on imported food, which has reached levels as extreme as 70% in 2019, diminished when the price of oil dropped.¹⁴ Bribery and corruption were common as Maduro put the military in charge of food supply, thus leading to a widespread malnutrition crisis, which, in 2018, rendered nearly 12% of the entire population undernourished.¹⁵

A pre-existing large-scale housing crisis was exacerbated during the presidency of Maduro due to a lack of steel and other building materials.¹⁶ A steel shortage prevented the government from building new buildings and basic household supplies, utilities and food could not be provided, resulting in a number of protests.¹⁷

Political

The political aspect of the issue is extremely significant since it concerns foreign powers and the UN. The Venezuelan presidential crisis in which the legitimate president of Venezuela cannot be recognized has been ongoing since 2019.

An initial petition to remove the president Maduro was presented by opposition members in 2016 due to the ongoing socio economic crisis. The call for a referendum was withheld for one month until it was announced that enough signatures had been gathered by the National Electoral Council (CNE). Over the course of the petition process, a total of 7 opposition activists were arrested by the country's intelligence service.¹⁸ Several days before the signature-gathering process the referendum was canceled citing voter fraud. This led to several protests in addition to an increased

¹⁰ Pérez, S.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelas-economic-collapse-explained-in-nine-charts-11553511601>

¹¹ Doocy, S., Page, K., M.D., Broner, T. T.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/04/venezuelas-humanitarian-emergency/large-scale-un-response-needed-address-health>

¹² Doocy, S., Page, K., M.D., Broner, T. T.

¹³ Doocy, S., Page, K., M.D., Broner, T. T.

¹⁴ Corrales, J.

¹⁵ Doocy, S., Page, K., M.D., Broner, T. T.

¹⁶ Baral, S. (2014, May 06). Venezuela Housing Shortage: Nicolás Maduro Announces That Abandoned Cars Will Be Turned Into Homes. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.latintimes.com/venezuela-housing-shortage-nicolas-maduro-announces-abandoned-cars-will-be-turned-homes-171317>

¹⁷ Gibbs, S. (2016, May 21). In Venezuela's housing projects, even loyalists have had enough. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/21/venezuela-unrest-chavistas-maduro-protests-shortages>

¹⁸ Con multitudinarias marchas, oposición venezolana presionó a Maduro para que reactive referendo. (2016, October 26). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from

<https://www.ambito.com/mundo/con-multitudinarias-marchas-oposicion-venezolana-presiono-maduro-que-reactive-referendo-n3960181>

international reaction.¹⁹ Protests strengthened after the TSJ took over the duties of the Assembly, an event considered a coup by the opposition.²⁰ The so-called Venezuelan Constitutional Crisis was seen as a way for Maduro to instate a one-man rule, therefore causing a massive wave of unrest that intensified the protests, although the decision was reversed 2 days later.

A special election was held in 2017 over Maduro's presidential decree to establish a new governmental body, the Constituent National Assembly of 2017, that would later go on to declare itself as the supreme body and ban the National Assembly from doing any actions that might contradict with the president and itself.²¹

The date of the controversial 2018 presidential election was moved back by Maduro since his party had won most of the governorships in the recent elections, thereby gaining an electoral momentum.²² He also announced that the opposition parties Justice First (Primero Justicia) and Popular Will (Voluntad Popular) would be prohibited to participate in the presidential election, after which Popular Will decided to call for a boycott against the election.²³

Although Maduro won the presidency by gaining the majority of the votes, there was controversy since campaigning efforts by opposition parties had been suppressed formally and informally.²⁴ Henri Falcón and Javier Bertucci, two of the main opposition candidates, refused to recognize the election citing an abundance of irregularities.²⁵ The questioning of the election's legitimacy was not only limited to Venezuela. In fact, many politicians spoke against the results of the election on the international scale. The Organization for American States (OAS) approved a resolution "declaring Maduro's presidency illegitimate" only minutes after his second inauguration in 2019.²⁶ Maduro's election was supported by 20 states while rejected by nearly 60 states.²⁷ Juan Guaidó, then the newly-elected president of the opposition-led National Assembly, thereafter assumed his new role as the President of Venezuela since "the nation faced a state of emergency." The National Assembly, having passed legislation to freeze Maduro's bank accounts in all countries, officially declared Maduro to be a "usurper of presidency" and called Guaidó the acting president of Venezuela.²⁸ The foreign involvement in the issue has also led to Maduro's mention of a coup d'état orchestrated by the United States with the objective of gaining control over Venezuelan oil.

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<https://www.ambito.com/mundo/con-multitudinarias-marchas-oposicion-venezolana-presiono-maduro-que-reactive-referendo-n3960181>

²⁰ Thofern, U. (2017, March 30). Opinion: Coup in Venezuela. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-coup-in-venezuela/a-38221905>

²¹ Ulmer, A., & Pons, C. (2017, May 23). As Venezuela unrest spreads, Maduro presses on with plans to rewrite charter. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-idUSKBN18J320>

²² Venezuela opposition weighs election run after talks end. (2018, February 08). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42984448>

²³ Venezuela opposition banned from running in 2018 election. (2017, December 11). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42304594>

²⁴ Olmo, G. D. (2019, January 10). Toma de posesión de Nicolás Maduro en Venezuela: Por qué es polémica y por qué lo hace ahora si las elecciones fueron en mayo. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46805683>

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<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Falcon-Bertucci-Refuse-to-Recognize-Venezuela-Election-Results-20180521-0001.html>

²⁶ La OEA aprobó la resolución que declara ilegítimo al nuevo gobierno de Nicolás Maduro. (2019, January 10). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from

<https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/01/10/en-vivo-la-oea-debate-en-sesion-extraordinaria-la-asuncion-de-nicolas-maduro/>

²⁷ Shen, A. K., & Marczak, J.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/venezuela-s-sham-election>

²⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-freeze-idUSKCN1P92G3>

The crisis is still yet to be solved, as Maduro has not seized control of governmental institutions and the call for Guaidó is still valid. The military uprising in 2020, albeit a factor undermining popular support for Guaidó, has brought back the possibility of a military solution.

TIMELINE

1958	Venezuela has its first democratically-elected government
2003	Chávez begins to implement various social programs in order to gain support from the public
March 2013	Chávez dies and his successor vice-president Nicolás Maduro takes office
April 2013	Maduro defeats opponent by 1.5% margin in presidential election
January 2014	People take to the streets as opposition leaders attempt to remove Maduro from office
December 2014	Central Bank of Venezuela confirms economic recession
December 2015	The opposition party gains majority in the National Assembly
2015-2017	Food shortages continue all across the country as systems of supply collapse
March 2017	The government-lead Supreme Court of Venezuela bans opposition from participating in the elections, violent clashes ensue
July 2017	The new Constituent Assembly is created in a referendum as an all-powerful body, later taking over the functions of the opposition-led National Assembly
August 2017	Members of the Constituent Assembly officially sworn in
February 2018	The government and the opposition fail to agree on an election date as opposition parties call for a boycott over the elections
May 2018	An early presidential election takes place despite fraud claims from the opposition and Maduro wins majority
November 2018	United Nations announces that over 3 million people have left Venezuela due to shortages in food and medicine
January 2019	Venezuelans protest asking Maduro to step down shortly after his inauguration while the international community is divided between support for Maduro and Guaidó
February 2019	Maduro denounces humanitarian aid from the United States and Donald Trump issues an ultimatum to the Venezuelan military forcing them to side with the opposition
March 2019	Having defied his home arrest, Guaidó returns from his 10-day exile as the government bans him from participating in politics for 15 years while Venezuela's National Assembly declares a state of emergency over ubiquitous blackouts
April 2019	Venezuelans protest against Guaidó's removal of parliamentary protections as well as the power outages
November 2019	Another parliamentary crisis ensues as a corruption plan called the Operación Alacrán seeks to prevent the re-election of Guaidó as the head of National Assembly and instead instills Luis Parra
January 2020	Guaidó re-elected as head of National Assembly

SPECIFIC EVENTS

Arrest of Guaidó

On January 14 2019, Guaidó was arrested and released 45 minutes later by the Venezuelan intelligence service.²⁹ The Minister of Information stated that the detention was orchestrated by Guaidó himself to boost popularity while international sources identified it as a genuine threat to the opposition.³⁰

Operation Gideón

On May 3 2020, a private military company based in the United States and Venezuelan dissidents collaborated in an attempt to remove Maduro from office. Since the group was infiltrated by Maduro supporters from early on, it was called a suicide mission. The attack went on and was unsuccessful, however, as Guaidó, revealed by the Maduro government to have ties to the private military company, denied any involvement.³¹

Military Uprising

A military operation called Operation Freedom (*Operación Libertad*) was orchestrated by civilians and a group of military personnel in order to end the usurpation of the presidency on 30 April 2019.³² During the uprising, the main opposition leader Leopoldo López was freed from house arrest. The operation eventually resulted unsuccessfully, as it lacked support from senior member of the military.

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²⁹ Faiola, A. (2019, January 25). Who is Juan Guaidó? Retrieved January 06, 2021, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/venezuelas-opposition-is-gambling-it-all-on-a-young-and-untested-activist-named-juan-guaido/2019/01/14/90156b76-16a4-11e9-ab79-30cd4f7926f2_story.html

³⁰ Juan Guaidó: Venezuela's opposition leader briefly detained. (2019, January 13). Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46857643>

³¹ García, L. (2020, May 12). Guaidó insiste en que falsificaron su firma en el contrato con Silvercorp. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/05/guaido-insiste-en-que-falsificaron-su-firma-en-el-supuesto-contrato-con-silvercorp/>

³² Sequera, V., Berwick, A., & Cohen, L. (2019, April 30). Venezuela's Guaidó calls for uprising but military loyal to Maduro for now. Retrieved January 06, 2021, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics/venezuelas-guaido-says-troops-join-him-for-coup-government-says-it-is-firmly-in-control-idUSKCN1S60ZQ>

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