

>> **Colombia: What is being said about the new era of Santos?**

Bogotá >> 09 >> 2014

The Colombian presidential elections in 2014 will go down in history as having had a series of surprises. Juan Manuel Santos took office as the President of Colombia for the second time on August 7 after a controversial campaign and very tight results in the first round of voting.

In front of more than 2,000 attendees —including 128 official delegations from different countries, who included several heads of state, prime ministers, vice presidents and chancellors— Santos delivered a speech focussed on the three pillars he said would be the aims of his government over the next four years: peace, equality and education. A statement of intent has already been backed up by numerous gestures. Examples of this are the creation of new governmental positions like the Minister Counsellor of Post-Conflict, which will be occupied by Oscar Naranjo.

With regard to peace, Santos specified that real peaceful acts in the country are required. One issue that is being called into question is the murder of three policemen in an

ambush attributed to the revolutionary group on August 21, and the continuous attacks against the country's infrastructure. These incidents are having a negative impact on the economy. In response and in a gesture of willingness for dialogue, Santos announced on the same day that a military delegation would join the peace process negotiations in Havana. This is the first time the military has taken part in meetings of this kind and has drawn criticism in some sectors calling it a "humiliation."

With regard to equality, the president expressed different aims, including increasing the percentage of people freeing themselves of poverty and extreme poverty, lowering the rates of unemployment, reducing the housing deficit, improving the health care system both its infrastructure and in the services it offers, and improve the quality of life in communities and vulnerable populations suffering from neglect and extreme poverty.

The last of these pillars is education. The president will seek to improve the quality and coverage of education in the country. A budget of \$28.9 billion (out of a total of \$216.2 billion) has been earmarked for this area in 2015. Education and security are the two items where more funds are being made available. For the first time the amount allocated to education has exceeded that given for defence.

In order to meet these objectives, Santos has named a cabinet with a technical profile made up of 16 ministers and four other newly created positions. The parties that demonstrated the most amount of support for the president have been recognised in the cabinet. The U party and liberalism, allies in the presidential campaign, received five positions each, including the important departments of Defence, Education, Agriculture, Commerce, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Interior, among others. Radical Change and the vice president Germán Vargas have also benefitted. They have been given two important ministries: Transportation and Housing. Similarly, the Conservatives have been given the Ministries of Finance and Mines and Energy. Two independents will control the departments of Employment and Culture.

At the same time, Santos has abolished the high councils of the President to create four new positions: Ministry of the Presidency (Nestor Humberto Martínez), Minister Counsellor of Post-Conflict, Human Rights and Security (Oscar Naranjo), Minister Counsellor of the Government



and Private Sector (Maria Lorena Gutiérrez) and Minister Counsellor of Communications (Pilar Calderon).

In general, political analysts and national and international industry have positive expectations for the new cabinet. They are believed to be well prepared and of the highest standard to help find solutions for the social problems faced by the country.

If we begin on the national stage, the appointment of Santos' cabinet has caused some surprise but the reaction has generally been good in industry associations. Comprised of more technical than political people, the president has been criticised in some policy areas mainly by taking a path of continuity and selecting a team that does not represent the country's reality. These views have been expressed in different sectors. They have made reference to the fact that despite the high percentage of black people in the country, their share in government is insignificant. Similar criticism has been made towards Santos for not providing any representation to those from the Valle del Cauca, where the president won the most number of votes, Santander or Nariño. In response, 12 of the 21 U Party senators abstained from attending the first party meeting with the president.

In addition, the announcement of the new roles and functions has caused controversy among some factions who believe that they cause a political and institutional imbalance.

They have already begun to work with the private sector. They along with the Business Association of Colombia (ANDI) have started to develop a roadmap for industry and a 100-day action plan. This demonstrates that Colombia has clear ideas that point towards a common goal between the government and the industrial sector: company growth, competition, job creation and conquering global markets. The president of the organisation welcomed the support and protection of private property that the head of the government has announced. At the same time, and this time in relation to taxation, he has announced that there should be an increase in the number of formally recognised companies that pay taxes, provide social benefits and are subject to the control of labour inspectors. This is similar to a call made by the Agricultural Society of Colombia (SAC).

Unions and workers have also expressed their positions to the new government, often with mixed opinions. The Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC) stressed that despite the government's promises, nothing has changed, however they praised their certain successes such as the peace process. Alongside them, the CGT and the CUT, several sectorial federations and independent unions had recently announced their strong support for the peace process. The National Association of Workers and Public Servants in Health Services, Social Security and Supplemental Services of Colombia (ANTHOC) criticised the government's preservation of the status quo and its failure to complete its commitments as well as not dealing with the conflicts experienced by farmers and the deterioration of the health system.

"On the international scene, the leaders of many countries, mainly in Latin America, have supported Santos. They have already expressed their confidence in the re-elected government"

The education sector is one of the main beneficiaries of the budget for 2015. Despite the increased allocation of resources, it remains cautious. The president of Fecode, the Colombian Federation of Educators, has said they do not want education to become a business in which involvement in it is solely from the private sector.

The mining sector has also expressed some concerns. They have mainly called for greater coordination between government agencies and improvements in process controls and regulations, an increase in company production and incentives for public exploration. In terms of construction,

the Colombian Chamber of Construction has considered the continuity of the Minister for his knowledge of ongoing projects to be a good decision.

On the international scene, the leaders of many countries, mainly in Latin America, have supported Santos. They have already expressed their confidence in the re-elected government. The president of neighbouring Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, welcomed the re-election of the president, insisting, "Peace in Colombia has never been as close as it is now." However, hours before Santos' inauguration, Maduro announced that he would not attend the ceremony. The heads of state from Paraguay, Panama, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Guyana were present.

The Pacific Alliance also has positive expectations for the government of Juan Manuel Santos. During his speech, the re-elected president made an appeal for the strengthening of the Pacific Alliance, a fact that he reinforced by holding bilateral meetings in the days leading up to his re-inauguration. International analysts who see in Santos' government positive advantages for growth in the country such as its prudent economic policies, advances in infrastructure and the social reforms that are being carried out ratified this.

The European Council also wanted to express the European Union's support for the peace programme that is being developed in a bilateral meeting with the President. Another gesture of the continued integration of Colombia in the international arena can be seen with the appointment of a Minister of Government and the Private Sector whose post includes the coordination of the country's entry into the OECD. This appointment is part of the recommendations for restructuring the Executive during talks held in Cartagena by President Bill Clinton and Tony Blair after Santos' re-election.

There have been more reactions in the USA. President Obama, who did not attend the inauguration, met with Juan Manuel Santos days before his election to reaffirm its strategic security alliance.

In conclusion, Colombia faces a new stage in which there is an expression of change mixed with a preservation of the status quo. There is a commitment both nationally and internationally to provide unconditional support for President Santos.



>> **Carolina Perez.** Account Manager LLORENTE & CUENCA Colombia. She has a degree in journalism and 14 years experience. Since early 2008, Carolina has worked as a communications consultant at LLORENTE & CUENCA specialising in the areas of corporate, litigation, crisis management, and finance in our offices in Spain. She is currently an account manager at the company's offices in Bogotá. Previously she worked with leading media in Spain for seven years, including over five years as a writer and broadcaster in Cadena Cope, leaders in news programmes and magazines. In addition to that, for nearly two years she was an account executive in a Spanish communications agency specialising in tourism and institutional marketing.

d+i LLORENTE & CUENCA

d+i is the LLORENTE & CUENCA Ideas, Analysis and Trends Centre.

Because we have a new macroeconomic and social script. And communication is not lagging behind. It is progressing.

d+i is a global combination of relations and exchange of knowledge that identifies, focuses and transmits new communication patterns from an independent position.

d+i is a constant flow of ideas moving ahead of new trends in information and business management.

d+i LLORENTE & CUENCA exists because reality is not black or white.

www.dmasillorenteycuenca.com