

Peace in Colombia : Can the European Union and the US collaborate??

Colombia has been the recipient of the European Union Official Development Aid (ODA) and US foreign aid (military aid and ODA) since the late 1990s. Both international actors have their own particular understanding of the armed conflict, the possible solutions and the role of foreign aid. From one side, the US emphasises military aid and uses ODA in function of security objectives, by working closely with the Central government and President Uribe. On the other side, the EU cautiously develops a common foreign policy to Colombia and insists in civil society participation and local programs in a rather bottom up peacebuilding approach. Considering their different approaches to the Colombian conflict, the war on drugs, the war against terrorism and human rights in the Andean region, this paper will assess the possibility of collaboration between both international actors.

Understanding the main donors' positions in Colombia can be useful in beginning to consider transatlantic collaboration in an area of US influence. The results of the election in the US can affect the dynamics in Colombia since Plan Colombia and its regional version could be reevaluated. The interaction of both actors in Colombia could be decisive in the search for peace. If the collaboration scenario is confirmed, new perspectives on working together could be studied in other conflict areas in the world.

This paper first provides a short description of the internationalisation of the Colombian conflict, then focuses on the two main international actors for peace or war: the USA and the EU. Their positions on Colombia will be compared by first highlighting the differences in their actions and the clear divisions they professed during the last Peace Process with the guerrillas. Then the analysis focuses on the cautious beginnings of collaboration and the possibilities of working together for peace in Colombia in light of a new US government.

Introduction: the Colombian conflict and its internationalisation

Colombia has the third largest population of Latin America, with 45 million people. It is a middle-income country rich in natural resources (petroleum, coal, coffee, flowers, gold, emeralds) with a per capita GDP of \$8400, having a visibly unequal GINI coefficient of 0.86 and a rank of 70 out

of 177 countries for human development. Colombia has suffered almost four decades of violent internal conflict which has been exacerbated by an illicit drug trade. Basically, the conflict involves guerrillas, paramilitaries, the State and society.

Simply stated, the conflict concerns two main guerrilla groups formed in the 1960s: the FARC Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the ELN-National Liberation Army. Paramilitary forces appeared as actors in the conflict at the end of the 1990's when they went from being in the service of drug-barons and powerful landlords to become a new relatively organized armed group (AUC, Colombian Union of Auto-defense forces). The Colombian State considers itself a rather stable democracy but is suspected of working closely with narcotics traffickers and paramilitaries. The Colombian society can be seen as victim, witness, and party in the war.

The end of the Cold War changed the internal dynamics of the Colombian conflict and an internationalisation took place in two ways. First, the serious consequences of internal conflict started to clearly affect other countries. Second, the world became aware of the Colombian crisis and the International Community became involved in the search for a resolution.

The Colombian conflict in the international scene

Colombia became of international interest during the 1980s, when the drug cartels occupied the main focus of the US anti-drug campaign. Meanwhile, the Colombian government and society were subjected to the violence or the influence of the drug mafia. Behind the sudden international interest, a long term conflict had been developing. During the 1980s and mid-1990s, each Colombian administration had negotiated with different guerrillas groups, with more or less success. It was not until the end of the 1990s that the international community became considerably involved in a peace process.

When the international community was invited to participate in the Colombian struggle for peace, the country was trying to get out of an "impasse". On one hand no negotiations with the FARC and ELN seemed possible, as there was an absence of a leftist political party with whom the government could work in order to start negotiations with guerrilla groups. On the other hand, paramilitary groups were increasing, as well as violence and human rights violations, including forced displacements and massacres (30,000 violent deaths per year, 10 kidnappings per day, almost 3 million displaced, 2 million abroad). Also, poverty was rising (19% of the population below nutritionally-defined subsistence level). In addition, cocaine production accelerated and Colombia became the world's largest producer of the drug, with 57% of total production. In the end, the problem of drug overlapped with guerrilla-paramilitaries activities. Thus, Colombia became the bad neighbour with its drug production, environmental disasters, trafficking in

zones out of state control, and refugees and displaced populations fleeing to Ecuador, Venezuela, the USA and Europe.

Most peace negotiations until 1998 had been realized internally with little cooperation from other countries, the exceptions being Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Germany and Spain, which have served as seat for peace talks¹. Afterwards, the president Andres Pastrana, elected in 1998, proceed with an internationalisation of the conflict resolution with his “diplomacy for peace”. The Colombian government asked the support of the EU, its member states and the US in two ways: first, diplomatic support for peace talks through a group of “friends of the peace process” –a kind of international participation which differs from mediation; second, economic support for a sort of “Marshall Plan” for the post-conflict period. In 1999, peace talks started with the FARC and the ELN and both international actors, the US and the EU, got involved.

I) The US and EU: distinct international actors

The US and EU are different international actors, with dissimilar interests and instruments. Even though they utilize diplomatic efforts and foreign aid as a tool, they do not have similar understandings of the Colombian conflict and its transnational dimension, nor of the role of ODA in conflict scenarios. It has not been their objective to work together from the macro level.

1. Understandings and instruments defining international actors' behaviour

The USA and the EU respond in different ways to the Colombian challenge. Their responses depend on (1) their perception of the threat that the Colombian conflict and its transnational dimension could represent for their “national” interests, (2) their reading of the Colombian situation and (3) their resulting opinion regarding the possible solution to the conflict and thus the role designated to ODA and military action. Even though the actors' interpretations and opinions have changed over time, as of late a general picture can be drawn regarding their current position from the basis of official statements, foreign policy documents, papers on development programmes, and interviews.

Perception of the Colombian conflict as a threat

¹ The most successful peace processes happened at the beginning of the 1990s with the M19 guerrilla group allied with other smaller guerrilla groups. The final result of these negotiations was the new Constitution of 1991 which radically changed the precepts established in the former Constitution of 1886.

The Colombian conflict can be perceived as a threat to US national interests, EU member states national interests and EU common interests². Threats can be related either to the protection of geopolitical interests in Colombia, or the containment of a physical threat emanating from Colombia.

From the American perspective, it is in the national interest to defend Colombia because of its geographical position and energy and natural resources in the Andean region. Military and transport control in the zone have always been important to the US. Therefore, when the US turned over the Howard base to the Panamanian government in 1999, Colombia and its frontiers became of particular interest to new military and transport control points in the region. Besides, US imports from Colombia and American capital are concentrated in energy resources such as petroleum and coal which are extracted in conflict areas³.

The USA would also perceive action in Colombia as a way of containing threats. The main threat is drug production and commercialisation, as 90% of the cocaine consumed in the USA comes from Colombia⁴. Other threats may involve illegal migration as the American territory is the primary destination for the 3 million Colombians living outside the country⁵. There also could be a perception of the regional stability being threatened by the Colombian conflict or by its neighbour Venezuela. Indeed, even before 9/11, the Colombian conflict was seen as risky for the region because of possible spill-overs. Moreover, today Colombia is the most loyal ally of the USA in leftist South America and the closest neighbour of Hugo Chavez's Venezuela.

From the European perspective, the defence of national interest is less clear and the behaviour is unexpected regarding threat containment. First of all, because of the existing complexities implied in defining European interests. Second, because the relations between the EU and Colombia are more recent and superficial than those with the US. Still, the EU member states are the second largest foreign investors and trade partners in the Colombian economy,⁶ concentrating their capital in electricity, water, gas, the financial sector and metal-mining. Notably, French, Spanish and German investments are quite high in the region. On the contrary, one could think that European concerns are more focused in containing threats as drugs and illegal

² Based on the conclusions of PENSKA, Susan, "EU and US Threat perceptions after 9/11", in *European Security and transatlantic relations after 9/11 and the Iraq War*, edited by Heinz Gartner and Ian Cuthbertson, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

³ Colombia represents the 4th largest partner in the continent, notably with petroleum and coal. 40% of Colombian exports go to USA, 30% of imports come from the US and the US is the largest foreign investor in petroleum and coal. Source: WB, IMF

⁴ Colombia profile, published at the web site of State Department: [www>state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm)

⁵ GIUGALE, Marcelo, LAFOURCADE, Olivier, LUFF, Connie, Colombia. The Economic Foundation of Peace, The World Bank, Washington, dic 2002.

⁶ The EU receives 20% of Colombian exports, 16% of imports come from EU. 26% of foreign investment is European: water, coal, electricity

migration. But Europe is orienting its counter drug policy⁷ towards Asia and the transport circuits in the Caribbean Sea. Concerning illegal migration, South America is not considered a priority source of migrants.

Reading of the Colombian situation

What do the actors understand about the Colombian conflict and the Colombian state? Their perspective means, on one hand, having a vision of the Colombian conflict: identifying who the actors are, why they are fighting, the causes of the conflict and the dimensions (regional, national, local). On the other hand, it means measuring the Colombian State's capacity to deal with internal violent conflict and transnational problems, and civil society's capacity to participate.

For the US, the Colombian conflict is internal, in which the state is attacked by leftist guerrillas considered to be terrorist groups and more recently by paramilitaries. Furthermore, the drug economy imposes its logic over political grievances. Consequently, the Colombian state is seen as a victim of the transnational forces which overwhelm it.

Conversely, for the EU, the conflict in Colombia is internal with a regional dimension, the Andean region. Fighting parties are the Colombian State and the guerrilla groups. Paramilitaries used to be considered "peace enemies" until 2006 when they were tacitly recognised as valid political interlocutors⁸. According to EU declarations, the conflict is a cancer that allowed political and everyday violence to be added to historical problems such as poverty, social inequality, injustice, corruption and impunity⁹. In this perspective, the Colombian state has been reduced by this cancer and the still weak democracy could be seen as a possible threat for regional stability due to its cocaine production, flux of refugees, environmental problems, etc.

Possible solutions and instruments

The opinion concerning the possible solutions for the Colombian conflict is linked to the interpretation of the problem and the instruments available to each actor.

The general solution from an American point of view seems to be the destruction of the drug economy, leaving the warring parties without financial

⁷ LABROUSSE, Alain, VANHOUT, Ann, *Final Report: Study, the EC financing for the fight against drugs in developing countries*, IBF International Consulting, October 2004.

⁸ It happened when the EU changed its attitude towards the peace process with Paramilitary Forces initiated by President Uribe in 2005. After demanding a clear legal framework for the process, the EU Council tacitly accepted the political status of the illegal armed group (Luxembourg, 2678th EU Council session- General Affairs, 3/ October/ 2005). Once the "Law of Justice and Peace" was launched, the EU decided to indirectly support the reinsertion process and the judicial system reform. The mechanism of rapid action was launched December 22, 2005 for 1.5 millions Euros in order to guarantee the application of the transparency of the law.

⁹ Colombia, Country Strategy Paper, 2002-2007, p3.

means. Until 2003, there was a clear difference between the war on drugs and the rebels' conflict, since then they have been the same: war on drugs and war on "narco"-terrorism. The specific solution concerns the reinforcement of the Colombian state's military capacity in order to help it recover control of the whole national territory with military aid, which is the greatest portion of total US aid to Colombia (US\$6.03 billion for the period 2000-2008¹⁰). Supporting the security task, US cooperation programs focus mostly on alternative development and eradication, then on humanitarian relief to displaced and vulnerable populations, and reform of the judicial system¹¹. Although American official development aid for Colombia is 5 times less than the military aid, it is still 37%¹² of the total aid and continues to increase.

The EU perspective has not been that clear. Relations between Colombia and the EU started in the 1980s with small bilateral aid. At the end of the 1990s the EU decided to participate in the struggle for peace. Since then, there has been a continuous construction of a common position, the basis for which is the European ODA, the only foreign policy instrument on which every member and EU institution agree. Thus, the European position as a donor for peacebuilding in Colombia has presented different phases linked to the construction of the EU as a global actor. For instance, the construction of the EU's development policy, its enlargements, its growing economic power and presence in Latin America, as well as the definition of the European profile as a peace actor and its experiences in conflict scenarios and crisis, have affected its relation with Colombia. Nevertheless, it is manifest that the European perspective has been, intentionally or not, different from the American. For the EU the general solution of the Colombian conflict is an extreme reform of the whole Colombian society at the political, economic and social levels. The specific solution proposed by the EU is the creation of spaces for dialogue, zones of "peace", and the reinforcement of the local population's capacity to defend human rights and acquire accountability over the State through ODA programs. Here, the first step towards conflict resolution implies recovering the social tissue and giving the combatants, coca producers and vulnerable populations opportunities to leave the war and join the legal economy. In addition, the European cooperation situates the judicial system reform at the core of social transformation. EU aid for Colombia is 31% of the total aid in execution in 2008, 12.37% of total aid for the period

¹⁰ Source: <http://justf.org/Country?country=Colombia>

¹¹ "The Colombia program's principal focus remains the promotion of alternative development, which coupled with U.S. government-supported eradication and interdiction efforts, is designed to reduce the cultivation of illicit crops and stem the production and flow of illicit drugs to the United States. The program will strengthen and expand the presence of state institutions while simultaneously weakening the efforts of the three principal illegal armed groups (a total of approximately 40,000) whose ruthless pursuit of drug profits has a destabilizing effect upon the country..." in "USAID Budget" available at <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/lac/co.html>.

¹² Statistics from the Office of International Cooperation of Accion Social, Colombia.

1998-2007 and 49% of total aid considering member states bilateral contributions for the same period¹³.

Differences between both actors are evident since the US proposal emphasizes military security, whereas the European approach highlights the importance of peacebuilding. While the US points up that the Central State is a partner for security, the EU has until now worked closely with “civil society” and local institutions. Nonetheless, the weight of US assistance shows the importance accorded by the US government towards being actors in Colombia. It stands out against the relatively low weight of the EU policies in the Colombian political scene.

The solutions advocated by both actors are linked to their instruments at hand. For example, the US military capacity is overwhelming, as has been demonstrated at different levels throughout Latin America. Furthermore, the solution proposed by the US could be influenced by the fact that the Southern Command¹⁴ manages a large part of the US budget for Latin America¹⁵. Most of this aid goes to Colombia for: the training of soldiers and direct assistance to American militaries in Colombia implementing global security strategies and protecting petroleum pipelines, arms, helicopters and airplanes¹⁶. Additionally, in 2004, Colombia signed the “98 Article Agreement of the Roma statute” (bilateral pact for the restriction on trying American citizens). The leading programs of the US are the war on drugs, war against terrorism and cooperation through USAID for alternative development. For the EU, the choice of instruments for acting in Latin America does not include military action. The EU is limited to working with trade, development aid and diplomacy. Moreover, it has been its choice to emphasize multilateral policy through diplomatic and financial support to UN agencies (specially the UN Secretary General’s special adviser on Colombia¹⁷). Leading EU programs have been conflict prevention against “new threats”¹⁸ and cooperation with the AL to fight poverty¹⁹.

¹³ Statistics from the Office of International Cooperation of Accion Social, Colombia, http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/acci/web_acci/nuevomapa/bienvenida.html.

¹⁴ The United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is one of nine unified Combatant Commands (COCOMs) in the Department of Defense. Its area of responsibility is Central and South America, the Caribbean, Cuba and the Bahamas. Their mission is to provide contingency planning, operations, security cooperation for the area, force protection of U.S. military resources at these locations, to ensure the defense of the Panama Canal and canal area. <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/index.php>

¹⁵ Op.cit, ISACSON, 2004

¹⁶ ISACSON, Adam et al, Latin America working Group Education Fund, WOLA and CIP, “Diluyendo las divisiones. Tendencias de los programas militares de EEUU para America Latina”, septiembre 2004, www.ciponline.org

¹⁷ Jan Egeland from 1999- 2002, and James Le Moyne 2002-2005.

¹⁸ “A secure Europe in a better world”, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

¹⁹ The security strategy of the EU looks for peace, security and stability for Europeans by acting at the global level. Stability and peace promotion programs are being carried out in: Palestine, Balkans, Georgia, and peacekeeping civil-military operations in Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia, Congo RDC.

In sum, the US seems to identify more 'national interests' at risk in Colombia than the EU does. From an American perspective, Colombia is seen as a close ally but also the harbourer of the largest threat in the western hemisphere²⁰. In general, the US exposes an international-actor profile focused on maintaining security and reacting in its area of influence, using foreign aid directly to support security goals. Whereas, the EU presents itself as a development and trade actor approaching security matters and conflict prevention through humanitarian and developmental instruments, acting far from its regions of priority.

Evidence of these differing approaches was visible during the fragile peace process of 1999-2002 when the Colombian government was caught between two rationales: peace through development and negotiation versus peace through military support to the Colombian State. Today, the differences are less evident. The use of the ODA is less dissimilar and both actors are close to President Uribe, although the US seems in symbiosis with central State decisions while the EU is just in a confidence building scheme.

2. From antagonism to dissension

In the beginning, both approaches were antagonistic. The objectives, instruments and strategies were heading in different directions. Colombia became a stage for the EU to distinguish itself as a global actor who was fundamentally different from US. However, since 9/11, differences between the actors have been nuanced. Since president Uribe won his first election, both actors seemed to adapt to new international and domestic donors' conditions, as well as to the Colombian government's strong position against the guerrillas.

In view of the dynamics of peace and conflict in Colombia, as well as the changes of presidency and foreign policies, I will analyse the interactions between the international and domestic levels for both donors²¹. Thus, I will consider (1) the role of the US, the EU and the transatlantic relation in international security, (2) the lobbying of national enterprises and private sector organisations in domestic discussions and decision making, (3) the donors' domestic presidential cycles, (4) the lobbying of transnational actors: human rights and development NGOs and their capacity to circulate ideas and information.

The European Security Strategy, defended by the European Commission, uses foreign policy instruments such as: diplomacy, economical cooperation, trade, ODA.

²⁰ Statements of Army General James Hill, 24 march 2004, Commander of USA Southern Command, see <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=26972>

²¹ Based on PUTNAM, Robert, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games", *Inter-national Organization*, 1988, p.427-461

During the peace process (1999-2001): antagonism²²

During the peace process, the Colombian government looked for support for its “Marshall plan” for Colombia, calling it “Plan Colombia”. Here, the EU and the US accepted to play different roles, but formation process of the “Plan Colombia” was not transparent and the government developed different versions of the plan in order to please the donors. The final version of “Plan Colombia” was supported by the US in totality and rejected by the EU.

The Clinton administration was very distant during the peace process with both guerrilla movements. Despite guerrilla and government demands that the US government participate in dialogues, Clinton did not accept. Nevertheless, he decided to support the military aspect of “Plan Colombia”. This support got stronger towards the end of his administration, after the experiences with the war in Kosovo and the Camp David negotiations. Since 1998, the guerrilla groups were listed as terrorists, making it difficult for the US to participate in peace talks with them. However, military and chemical industries enjoy a strong lobbying capacity, which could help to explain the emphasis on strengthening the Colombian military’s ability and anti-drug fumigations without getting involved in “political issues”. It is these two aspects which little by little dominated the totality of Plan Colombia.

On the contrary, the EU and European states tried to get directly involved in negotiations and were invited to support “Plan Colombia”. Spain, France, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway were among the “friends of the peace process” group of countries. They were facilitating the dialogues but not mediating. Internally, member states agreed upon the need to support the Colombian government. However, when the final version of “Plan Colombia,” which was greatly influenced by the US administration, was presented to the supporters, the member states were divided. In 2000, Spain, Italy and England were ready to support the military aspect of “Plan Colombia” alongside the US but other member states disagreed. Conversely, France and Germany pushed for the development of a peacebuilding strategy. Ultimately, the EU established a common position countering the military aspects of Plan Colombia and proposed a peacebuilding program completely independent from the official strategy: the Peace Laboratories. This EU program deals almost directly with civil society initiatives and used to bypass the Colombian government. This special relation between Colombian civil society movements has been the result of transnational NGOs and leftist

²² A detailed work on this period antagonism: ROJAS, Diego, “Les interventions des acteurs extérieurs dans le conflit colombien: 1998-2002”, DEA Thesis for International Relations, University Paris I, November 2002.

movements with strong lobbying capacity within the European administrations and Brussels²³.

Until 2001, there was clear antagonism between the two visions of security and peace: a military perspective versus a conflict resolution and peacebuilding perspective. The US and the EU took part in the Colombian conflict, influenced by historical relations with the government and transnational actors. The peace-process, already weakened by multiple factors, suffered the consequences of the Plan Colombia's lack of transparency and a final emphasis on anti-drug and military policies. September 11th reinforced the US's initial position and nuanced the EU discord.

The end of the peace process (end 2001-2002): dissension

When the Bush administration launched the 'War on Terror' after 9/11, the Colombian peace process was very fragile. The peace talks officially came to an end in February 2002 after a series of violent attacks and multiple kidnappings by both guerrilla groups against the civil population.

The hardening of the American position in Colombia was the most evident consequence of the War on Terror. The Colombian conflict was understood to be a "narco-terrorist" matter, very dangerous for international security and, furthermore, relatively close to the US territory. The best solution seemed to be military action but not intervention. Throughout the Bush administration, the Southern Command has become increasing more active in decisions relating to foreign policy in Latin America. Consequently, Colombia received the largest percentage of the budget outlined for the region. Today it is the third largest recipient of US military assistance following Israel and Egypt since military assistance in Colombia (75% of US total assistance) has been renewed for the next version of Plan Colombia, the Plan Patriota and currently the Andean Strategy. In effect, the US counterdrug policy has taken a regional dimension, enlarging Plan Colombia to encompass the Andean region and increasing the presence of American military forces and assistance in the national armies and "grey areas" of the region.

The European opposition to the military component of Plan Colombia was still present but no special statements had been made. The EU continued to work with its Peace Laboratories and some member states struggled to save the peace process. When the government decided to stop the dialogue, the EU had to face the complexity of the Colombian conflict, including the kidnapping of Ingrid Betancur and the massacres of small villages in the countryside. Finally, in June 2002, the FARC were placed on the terrorist group list under the leadership of President Aznar (Spain).

²³ DAVIAUD, Sophie, "Societe Civile et droits fondamentaux en Colombie", draft to be published in *Revista estudios juridicos*, Universidad Nacional, Colombia, October 2007.

During this period, both actors were acting as low-profile antagonists, avoiding mutual confrontation. An evolution of a burden-sharing attitude can be seen with the arrival of President Uribe in August 2002.

Uribe's 1st Government: *Colombian State military choice does not provide a space for confrontation*

Alvaro Uribe was elected by a large majority which supported his position on the war against guerrillas. He became the first US ally in the region. His main policy has been “democratic security”, a policy whose goal is State control through military presence over the entire territory. President Uribe started dialogues with the paramilitaries from the extreme right and set up a legal framework for justice and peace still in existence today.

There was closeness between the US administration and Uribe's government's interpretation of the conflict's causes and solutions. It is not surprising that the US perception of the conflict influenced the official position: that the FARC and other guerrillas are a global threat linked to narco-traffic and terrorism networks and that the main cause of the conflict is greed. It is important to take into account that the neoconservatives were dominating the US vision of security; Afghanistan was subject to international intervention and by this time, Iraq had been declared the new target of the War on Terror.

This international scenario changed global energy stakes; Colombia, the fourth source of petroleum for the US, demanded more attention. A military program was then launched in order to protect the principal pipeline. The Bush administration allowed for an increase in the lobbying capacity of defence industries which usually support Plan Colombia. The southern area of Colombia was a target for military presence, fumigations and development programs carried out by US NGOs. Furthermore, respect for human rights did not accompany a more stringent military position in Colombia. For instance, the Leahy Law prohibiting military assistance for armies violating human rights with impunity was somehow bypassed as the State Department has been using waivers, and the Department of Defence's budget for Colombia has been increased for anti-drug and antiterrorism lines without having to abide by the human rights controls²⁴.

The EU was not expected to play an important role in Uribe's policies. When the Plan Patriota and the democratic security policies started, the EU strongly expressed the importance of respecting human rights and working towards peace. Since the Iraq war, the division within the EU with respect to Colombia's conflict disappeared. Colombia seems to have become a space of

²⁴ Information about the Leahy Law in <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/leahy.htm>

convergence between the member states; Spain, Italy and England's compatibility with the Plan Colombia was no longer expressed. The peace building programs are reinforced by a new Peace Laboratory carried out in three of the country's conflict zones which differ explicitly from the Plan Colombia zones.

Although no peace process took place, the EU continued to hope for a peacebuilding process at the local level in conflict zones. The EU did not have any guarantee that the first Laboratory was working and no evaluation was done before launching the second and third Laboratories. Moreover, the EU didn't have a clear political position regarding the military action and the strong antinarcotics fumigations. In fact, the EU could have supported the position of NGOs against the use of "glifosate" in the Amazon because of its harmful effects on human beings and biodiversity, yet no position was established and no budget attributed for an independent study capable of counter balancing the powerful chemical lobbyists in the US.

The behaviour of the FARC during the dialogues provided the EU with a great deal of information. The point of view Europeans had of the Colombian conflict before the peace process was strongly influenced by NGO networks, exiled people and the common imagery of the 1960s guerrilla movements in South America²⁵. Since 2002, Europeans were given another version of the conflict; they are much more informed than before regarding the "dark side" of guerrillas. The Delegation has gained much knowledge relating to the dynamics of the conflict: it has diversified its interlocutors, carried out many programs in conflict zones and most importantly, has started to work with the Central State despite the Council and Parliament reservations concerning the peace process with the paramilitary forces. The Colombian Consulate in Belgium has carried out an insistent information campaign for EU representatives and public servants about the Democratic Security achievements. Moreover, Europeans see the Andean region stability differently because of President Chavez anti-imperialist rhetoric and influence over Bolivia and Ecuador. Colombia is no longer seen as the unique centre of destabilisation but rather as a necessary point for balancing forces.

On the other side, President Uribe's policies concerning ODA have influenced the capacity of action of the EU. Effectively, since 2005 there has been a centralisation of the international cooperation under the Presidency Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation, *Accion Social*. Gradually, the International cooperation agency attached to the Foreign Affairs Ministry became part of the Presidency with the obvious intention of using ODA mainly for government priorities.

²⁵ DAVAIUD, Sophie, *Op Cit*.

In sum, during the first government of President Uribe, the EU seems to have developed a learning process on two levels. First the domestic level where member states find a common position; second, the external level at which the EU develops a tool for peacebuilding in conflict contexts adapting itself to President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy. The proximity between the US and the Colombian government in a post 9/11 context left no possibilities for argument over donors' approaches. The US and EU carried on with their cooperation programs and continued to dialogue with different Colombian State institutions, but they neither cooperated nor confronted.

II) The US and EU: getting closer to sharing the burden

There are important political differences that keep the US and EU from working together. This can be positive, and with a little bit of political will from the new US government and the EU, it can lead to a "burden sharing" through coordinated action for peacebuilding.

1. Towards burden-sharing ?

Uribe's popularity continued after 4 years of his presidency. He was re-elected in 2006 by a large majority who were willing to continue the Democratic Security policy supported by Plan Colombia/ Plan Patriota. Nevertheless, there is much discussion pertaining to the results: more security for whom? What sustainability? Is shifting the balance of forces an effective way to give the State an advantage? What are the impacts of a military policy on the civilian institutions?

President Bush continues his support of Uribe's government today, whereas the new democratic congress blocked assistance to Plan Colombia and the ratification of the Free Trade agreement. Congress' arguments relate to the violation of human rights and the proximity between paramilitaries and the actual government. It could be that the close relationship between Uribe and Bush is affecting the Congress's discussions, which are influenced by the predominant "anti-war" attitude in the US. Bush and his methods of carrying out war against terrorism are fairly unpopular at both the international and domestic levels. Neoconservative ideas and personalities are being questioned. One of the creators of Plan Colombia, Paul Wolfowitz, did not escape public scrutiny. With Obama's election and a Democratic congress, the aid package to Colombia is likely to be accepted but modified in order to increase the proportion allotted to social and economic programs to more than 45%. The

Free Trade Agreement is also going to be reevaluated so as to include environmental and labor provisions²⁶.

For 2006-2008, the USAID agency updated its priorities in Colombia, revealing a transformation in the way it perceives the Colombian conflict. USAID highlights the importance of building peace at the local and regional levels instead of insisting only on the importance of reducing illicit crops in order to protect American citizens²⁷. The root causes of Colombia's "ills" need a remedy for effectively fighting narcotics and terrorism while allowing the government to have total control of vital geographical corridors. It seems that the US position is changing and development programs could garner more visibility. Currently, USAID carries on more local government-friendly actions and expresses interest in learning from the EU experience²⁸. Nevertheless, the US profile as an ODA donor is rather weak, as the Southern Command presence and military focus leads the policy while weakening the USAID profile²⁹.

The EU has demonstrated that they are capable of a learning process in regards to their partnership with the Colombian government. Uribe's administration seems to participate actively in the design of Peace Laboratories and judicial reform programs. At the local and regional levels, the call for tenders motivates partnership between private sector, NGOs and public institutions. EU official statements have also begun to reveal an appreciation for Uribe's policies. Although some reservations as about politician-paramilitary links still exist, the declarations are supportive, the common aid budget has increased³⁰ and the EU and member States participate actively in the Government-Civil Society- Donors dialogue called the Londres-Cartagena Process. There seems to be a change in perception of Colombia: from a "fragile state under construction" to a capable state

²⁶ Although Latin America was rather absent from both candidates campaigns, the Free Trade Agreement US- Colombia was a main subject of controversy during the debate on October 15th 2008. McCain's position was for immediately accepting the agreement as a sign of support for the most important ally of the US in the region, while Obama opposed it due to violence against Colombian labor leaders and the unlikely possibility it would benefit workers and the general population rather than only further corporate interests. Both candidates agreed with the continuation of the Andean Strategy against Drugs.

²⁷ USAID, "Summary of USAID's Strategy and Program in Colombia for the period 2006-2008", www.usaid.com

²⁸ Conclusions from my interviews in Colombia with members of the European Delegation, USAID Press Department, Colombian public servants at Accion Social and Foreign Affairs Ministry during April 2008 and August 2008.

²⁹ During the administration the US acquired a greater military presence in the hemisphere and lost its civilian presence. The different "Commands" are leading the integration of : State Department, Justice Department, CIA, FBI, DEA, and USAID (p30, DEARE, Craig, "La militarizacion en América Latina y el papel de Estados Unidos" in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamerica*, Vol 8, 2008, pp 22-34). This is a reflection of the Defense- Diplomacy-Development perspective of Bush in which the division of labor among the Pentagon, the State Department and USAID has become blurred and the civilian counterparts lost to the military bureaucracies (ARTTWOOD, J Brian et al, in *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec 2008, pp123-132)

³⁰ See footnote 8

demanding support for fighting trans-national threats and strengthening complex weaknesses³¹.

A curious fact about US and EU cooperation in Colombia is that a transformation in the way programs are being conceived is taking place since 2007. In fact, the Peace Laboratory areas and USAID's new programs are growing geographically closer although they avoid working in the same municipalities (the EU refuses to work where fumigation and forced eradication of illicit crops are carried out). It is difficult to deduce if some kind of coordination is tacitly done in Bogota, but both international actors are targeting different sectors of society, institutions and zones, allowing space for complementarities.

2. The US and EU: are their proposals for peace compatible?

Behind the decision of how to work in a conflict environment resides the concept of peace. As Galtung³² stated, there are two basic perceptions of peace: negative and positive. Negative peace means the absence of war, of armed confrontation. Positive peace considers social political and economical aspects that can guarantee the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Uribe's policy has established a position closer to the negative peace perhaps, being optimistic, as a first step towards the construction of a lasting sustainable peace (the classical vision giving priority first to security and then to development). The government has been looking for international support for its Security policy, giving less weight to the transformation of root causes of conflict. The US strongly supports this official position and the EU has insisted on a more "positive peace" perception, based on peacebuilding programs.

Donors face a common dilemma in conflict countries such as Colombia: how to deal with security and, at the same time, be able to create paths towards development and democracy. The answer donors give to the question implies a way of working with the recipient State at the national and local levels, as well as with the civil society. The US and the EU answer differently to this in regards to Colombia. The US establishes a direct and fluent dialogue with the Central State Institutions, such as the Presidency, Ministries of Defence, and military and police forces. For its development programs the principal ally is Accion Social of the Presidency. The initial approach of the EU is focused on local initiatives coming from the civil society and local institutions with which Europeans had a continuous

³¹ Conclusions from my interviews in Brussels, Madrid, The Hague and Paris with public servants at Foreign Affairs Ministries, the CE, the PE and the Council in September- December 2007, and in Colombia with members of the European Delegation April 2008 and August 2008,

³² GALTUNG, Johan, *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace And Conflict, Development And Civilization*, SAGE publications, Oslo, 1996

dialogue. The relation with the Central government was mostly for the execution of the Peace Laboratories but nowadays there are more links to Accion Social and less with some of the local initiatives.

Regarding local institutions and authorities, the question raised is how susceptible to coercion by armed actors and narco-traffickers they are. This determines the design of public policy and donors programs, as the control over economic and political local powers is not on legal hands. Donors and Central State institutions minimise local authorities' responsibilities over development programs, in order to be more efficient and keep control over economic resources, with the perverse consequence of not guaranteeing the sustainability of programs. Since the second Peace Laboratories the Colombian government has pushed the EU into reinforcing the presence of local institutions; the US has also been doing this since last year.

In regards to civil society organisations, the big question is their neutrality and how they perceive international actors. Colombia has become a highly polarized society. The strategy of the government has closed dialogue options with opposition parties, leftist organizations, human rights defenders and syndicates. By declaring there is one sole enemy, the guerrilla "narcoterrorist", the president mistrusts and publicly disregards leftist movements. It is difficult to know how much some groups have been penetrated, but the point is that the strong government position does not help to develop a participative democracy with a bottom up defence of human rights and accountability exigencies. On the ground people do not establish an ideological position about the aid origins. They seem more interested in the kind of activities they support as local problems are economic and issues of survival. Nevertheless, in regions former or currently under guerrilla influence, there is an apprehension towards US aid, which is seen as an Empire intervention or as direct support of president Uribe's war. Moreover, USAID is used to work with American operators such as Chemonics, ARD, ACDI, which control resources without local government participation or local organizations' accountability. Then, European aid often implies less risk for personnel working with the executing organizations and for the population it benefits.

Having both actors pushing in dissimilar directions can be useful for peace as it allows two different visions of and within the same country, two different bets for resolution. Each alternative sustains diverse parts of society, making possible an integrated strategy for reinforcing democracy and development. For example, thanks to the EU and European donors' support of Peace and Development initiatives, they were able to survive the Democratic security policy and the government was pushed to reevaluate its initial position against them. The presence of European actors has somehow applied pressure for respect for human rights and for NGOs at the local and

national levels. At the same time US aid allows the Central Government to reinforce security and bring confidence to some sectors of the Colombian population and foreign investors.

Can they work together?

Both international actors could benefit from participating in trying for peace in Colombia-- in addition to the positive outcomes of any peace process. In effect, peace in Colombia could contribute to the security of American interests by reducing the threat and reinforcing its influence in the region, desperately needed after the Bush abandon of the hemisphere. For the EU, a peaceful Colombia would not only secure its interests, but also would create a political space for the EU on the continent. The EU stands to gain from obtaining a position as a global peacebuilding actor but it is not ready to engage in the Colombian struggle for peace as a counter-balance to the US. Then the question is: can they work together? If Obama's speeches reflect his intentions in the region, it is expected that defence of human rights, multilateralism and development of democratic institutions would be reinforced. Since Obama's preferred word was "leadership", there seem to be possibilities of seeing the US transforming donors' dynamics.

They can work together as they have been: with live and let live attitudes. But this has implications, including repeating efforts, demanding too much from the Colombian government (forced to lobby in Washington and Brussels), having parallel structures in Colombia, and not learning from each other experiences. For the Colombian government, having both actors as allies and supporters of its policies would be the best of worlds, the total "ownership". But many benefits of having two international actors would be lost in this total alignment scenario. The US and the EU have leverages for peace that need to be kept separate. The US has a huge influence over the government; with a Democrat President, this could be used not only for strengthening Colombia's security forces, but also for demanding respect for human rights and actions against "new" paramilitary groups. NGOs and local initiatives trust the EU and its willingness to support the basis of democracy. The EU, and some of its member states, have been important in keeping the peacebuilding perspective alive in the Colombian government agenda, and have also brought the UN into the Colombian scenario despite official resistance.

The challenge for the future transatlantic relations in Colombia is basically sharing the burden of the peace struggle in Colombia in a more intentional way. Support of the Colombian government's programs is important but there is no need to have all donors behind every official initiative. Efforts can be coordinated among donors and the central government for the macro policies, such as the transformation of the judicial

system, more transparency for the legislative bodies, and a free and improved media. Nevertheless, at the local level, many organizations and local initiatives need direct foreign support to survive. Dialogue between the local and national, civil society and official institutions, is not spontaneous and international actors can make it easier. As the Paris Declaration process continues, it is important to underline that for a middle income country where the ODA is less than 0.2% of its GDP³³, to give budgetary support to the government is not an efficient means of achieving peace. In the case of Colombia, the real difference of US and EU's development programs is that they have the label of the EU, USAID or UN. This makes it more difficult to misuse the resources and to ignore local initiatives and demands.

Conclusions

The EU and the US have been actively present in Colombia since the end of the 1990s. At the beginning they had opposing visions and proposals for peace. Since 9/11 and the fusion of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror, the conflict in Colombia has been transformed, as well as transatlantic relations. After a period of a rather unilateralist attitude from the US, the election of Barack Obama as president opens a window of opportunity for new multilateralist actions. Colombia has never been, and will not become, a priority for the US or for the EU. But the US has more interests at stake in Colombia and would be willing to exercise leadership in the region. Under a republicans' logic, a transatlantic strategy in Colombia would be less possible since US actions in Colombia are perceived as a personal support to an important ally in the Andean region. Let us hope that under Obama's government new diplomatic approaches will be possible for developing a greater focus on "peacebuilding" with active EU and UN participation. The challenge for the White House will be how to respect Uribe, the closest US ally in the leftist region, but at the same time be more oriented towards human rights, governance and justice.

Obama's campaign insisted on increasing ODA and civilian US presence in the hemisphere. But the economic crisis may shrink the total amount of aid. In any case US Foreign policy would have to rethink its structures concerning relations with Latin America and decide whether USAID or the Southern Command will lead the ideas and actions. Nevertheless, the US is leading two wars in the hemisphere, the War on Drugs and on Terror. On that point Obama's proposal during the campaign was ambiguous. He recognises the threats coming from southern neighbours but

³³ Taking the ODA of 2004, the year in which Colombia received the maximum amount of bilateral and multilateral ODA according to Accion Social statistics, available at:
http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/accci/web_acci/nuevomapa/main.asp

also the “shared responsibility” of the drug problem and its regional dimension. He also criticises the War on Drugs because of its failure to reduce cocaine coming from the Andean Region. Nevertheless, Obama did not propose a new policy and never mentioned the chemical and military industries’ lobbies and their influence over the Colombian case. Let us see what he will be able or willing to propose. At any rate, the US Congress supports Plan Colombia with a reduced budget for military actions and more funding for the ODA. In that case coordination with other donors and the Colombian State is more than necessary.

From the European side it is reasonable to expect a rather open attitude towards more dialogue at the national level with the USA. The EU has been building a common foreign policy for Colombia, in a continuous learning process about how to work in a non-strategic conflict country. Little by little the EU has become innovative in relations with civil society, the local governments, and the national government. I believe that in the process, the US position and action, and even a dialogue with USAID, have been taken into account. The transatlantic variable for each member state and for the different EU institutions has an impact on the way the EU behaves in Colombia. Although the peace laboratories were the result of one common decision seven years ago, and the breathing space is not huge, the Commission has been sensitive to changes in the international and Colombian context.

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