

# European Parliament backs US-led coup in Venezuela

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The European Parliament has voted a resolution supporting the brazen US-led coup to topple Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, endorsing the Trump administration's aggressive policy.

While right-wing oppositionist Juan Guaidó unilaterally declared himself president amid a mass rally in Caracas on January 23, Trump Tweeted: "Today, I have officially recognized the President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as the Interim President of Venezuela."

On Thursday night, the EU parliament voted 439 to 104, with 88 abstentions, to support Maduro's ouster. The resolution "recognises Mr Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" and urges that EU "Member States adopt a strong, unified stance, and recognise Juan Guaidó as the only legitimate interim president of the country." It also asks EU states to let Guaidó's allies take over their Venezuelan embassies, by deciding to "accredit those representatives to be appointed by the legitimate authorities" of Venezuela.

The resolution calls for strong-arming Maduro into holding new elections. It urges EU authorities "to engage with the countries in the region and any other key actors with the aim of creating a contact group ... with a view to building an agreement on the calling of free, transparent and credible presidential elections."

The resolution "condemns the fierce repression and violence, resulting in killings and casualties," which it blames exclusively on Maduro.

Venezuelan Ambassador to the EU Claudia Salerno criticized the vote, warning, "The important thing is to ask whether the European Union is willing to take a step forward to bring Venezuela into a situation of civil war; that is the question that must be asked." She said the EU is not "above the UN Security Council," where Maduro can rely on Russian and Chinese support.

Pro-coup Venezuelan oppositionist Antonio Ledezma told Euronews, however, that the EU "contact group" should only be used to hasten regime change: "If they're going to create a workgroup or something like that, then it has to be clear that we would only accept a workgroup to define the terms of the end of usurpation. Not false statements or negotiations that back Maduro."

Most of the main EU powers endorsed the coup: Germany, Britain, France and Spain all issued an ultimatum, going beyond the EU parliament resolution, for Maduro to step down in eight days. Italy's right-wing government broke with the consensus, however.

Foreign Minister Manlio di Stefano of the Five-Star Movement (M5S) condemned the coup, declaring: "Italy does not recognize Guaidó because we are absolutely against the fact that a country or group of external countries can define the domestic politics of another country. This is known as the principle of noninterference and it is recognized by the UN." Citing the 2011 NATO war in Libya, he warned that a coup could lead to war: "The same error was made in Libya; today everyone must recognize that. We must prevent the same thing from happening to Venezuela."

Di Stefano's position was publicly contradicted by Junior Foreign Minister Guglielmo Picchi of the neo-fascist Lega party, however. Picchi Tweeted, "Maduro's presidency is finished."

EU support for the coup in Venezuela marks a new exposure of the EU's pretensions to be the gentler, more democratic alternative to US imperialism. It is ultimately no less ruthless and willing to resort to war than Washington in pursuit of its predatory interests. As Washington escalates its confrontation with Russia and China, EU countries are stepping up social austerity and moving to pour hundreds of billions of euros into their own armies to join in the imperialist scramble to plunder profits and markets around the world.

In this scramble, Washington and the European powers are ultimately rivals—a rivalry that in the previous century twice plunged humanity into world war.

As the EU aligned itself with Trump in Venezuela, it announced the launch of a financial instrument to skirt the US dollar and US sanctions against Iran to allow trade in humanitarian goods. Esfandyar Batmanghelidj, the founder of a Europe-Iran business forum, hailed it as “an experiment and as part of a bigger project to strengthen EU economic power. ... The EU is doing something despite the position of the US, and in opposition to the US. This is something new.”

In Venezuela, however, the EU powers apparently prefer to extend their influence at Russian and Chinese expense by backing a right-wing US coup, for now at least.

Some of their calculations were laid out in a University of Hamburg briefing, titled “China is Challenging but (Still) Not Displacing Europe in Latin America.” It wrote that Europe “still holds the upper hand as the principal investor in Latin America,” with €1.2 trillion invested in the region but only \$110 billion from China. However, it worried that while “China has not really displaced Europe in terms of Latin American trade ... this might change in the future.”

On this basis, *Ouest France* sounded the call for a coup to oust China and Russia from Venezuela. Its January 31 editorial, “Venezuela divides the world,” stated: “Russia and China are faithful allies of the regime and will not easily abandon Maduro. Behind the ideological veneer, economic and geopolitical realities come first. Russia is Caracas’s top arms supplier and China its top creditor, lending it over 50 billion euros in exchange for oil. So Nicolas Maduro’s collapse would be a shock for Beijing, which is already facing the greatest slowdown of its economy in 40 years.”

It noted the conflict in Europe between those “more sensitive to Russian and Chinese support, like Italy,” and London, Paris, Berlin, The Hague, Lisbon and Madrid, who “exercise progressive pressure so normal elections take place. Failing that, these countries will recognize Juan Guaidó.”

Despite its invocations of democracy, *Ouest France* made clear it looks to the Venezuelan generals to oust Maduro, hailing “the decisive role of the army.” After noting “the absence, for now, of shifts from the army brass in favor of Guaidó,” it added: “But the situation is fluid, including among the officers. And US pressure is very strong.”

EU condemnations of repression in Venezuela are utterly hypocritical. Beyond their support for a coup in Caracas, their own regimes at home are turning themselves ever more into authoritarian police states deploying violence against opposition in the working class. While it denounces Maduro’s repression of right-wing protests in Venezuela, the EU is silent on the repression by the French government—with thousands of arrests and hundreds of casualties—of “yellow vest” protests against social inequality.

The Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government, which holds multiple political prisoners after cracking down on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, aggressively campaigned for regime change last week in Latin America. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stopped in Santo Domingo to denounce the Nicaraguan Sandinista government, after working to expel it from the social-democratic Socialist International. He then traveled on to Mexico to pressure it to back the Venezuelan coup.

Top PSOE official Alfonso Guerra made clear what methods Madrid is considering in Venezuela with remarkable comments endorsing the bloody 1974-1990 dictatorship of Chilean General Augusto Pinochet. While military dictatorships are “at least effective in the economic field,” Guerra said, Maduro is “useless.”

Citing surging inflation in Venezuela, Guerra added: “Between the horrible dictatorship of Pinochet, and the horrible dictatorship of Maduro, there is a difference: in one place the economy did not collapse, in another it has.” Guerra’s preference for a military regime carrying out mass murder over Maduro is an unambiguous signal that the EU supports a bloody coup in Venezuela.

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