

Spanish Socialist Party government backs US-led coup in Venezuela

By Alejandro López
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Since the Venezuelan crisis erupted, Spain has been at the forefront of the regime change operation underway in the oil-rich South American country. Today, Madrid is set to formally recognise Juan Guaidó as president. Guaidó is the right-wing leader of the National Assembly who Trump declared to be Venezuela's president on January 23.

The Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)-backed newspaper *El País* called this “unknown territory,” adding: “Never in contemporary times has a country stopped recognizing a head of state that maintains control of its territory... It is one thing not to recognise a state or to break diplomatic relations, and another to keep an embassy open in a country without recognizing who still controls the mechanisms of power.”

El País, one of the main papers backing the coup, laid out the strategy of the PSOE: “Guaidó will then appoint an ambassador to Spain,” Madrid would accept Guaidó's representative and “withdraw immunity and all diplomatic prerogatives from the ambassador appointed by Maduro... the current accounts of the embassy and in general all the assets and deposits of the Venezuelan state in Spain would be blocked and made available to the new president and his representative.”

El País added, “In diplomacy the principle of reciprocity applies, so the government can expect the Spanish Embassy in Caracas to be subject to similar measures.”

This is the latest in a list of provocations by the PSOE government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez against the Venezuelan government of President Nicolás Maduro.

No sooner had Guaidó self-proclaimed himself president than Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell spearheaded within the EU the demand for snap presidential elections. He declared, “We have to prevent the situation from worsening. This undoubtedly demands a process of intervention to guarantee the only way out is

elections.” Days later, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez phoned Guaidó to convey his “empathy for your courage.”

On January 26, at Spain's request, an EU foreign affairs meeting was held. Borrell said if presidential elections were not called, “We would consider adopting other measures including recognising (Guaido) as interim president.” This position was then backed by France and Germany and enshrined in the EU parliament statement that “The EU strongly calls for the urgent holding of free elections,” threatening that in the absence of “fresh elections ... the EU will take further actions, including on the issue of recognition” of Guaidó.

Spain, along with the UK, Germany and France, then pledged to recognise Guaidó if elections were not called within eight days. In the meantime, Sánchez travelled to South America to promote the coup.

As soon as he landed in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic for a meeting of the social democratic Socialist International (SI), Sánchez met with right-wing, US-backed Venezuelan opposition leaders Carlos Valero, Mauricio Poler and Paula di Mattia. Sanchez called Guaidó “the leader of the Venezuelan transition, and it will be he who leads the process of elections and the transition.” He stressed that Madrid did not recognize the May 2018 elections that gave Maduro a second term. Valero told reporters that the “power vacuum” must be filled.

Sánchez, who recently led the campaign to expel Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front from the Second International, then ranted against Maduro: “Whoever responds with bullets and prisons to the desire for freedom and democracy is no socialist, he is a tyrant. Venezuelans must feel the support of the Socialist International, and so must Nicaraguans.”

Sánchez's next stop was Mexico, the only Latin

American country besides Uruguay and Bolivia not to have recognised Guaidó. There, Sánchez tried to convince Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to break relations with Maduro and recognize Guaidó.

On Thursday, the PSOE, the right-wing Citizens party and the Popular Party (PP) endorsed the EU parliament's resolution to support recognizing "Guaidó as Interim President of Venezuela."

Spain's support for regime change exposes fraudulent claims last June, after the installation of the PSOE government, that Sánchez was, in *Foreign Policy's* words, "keen to show a more progressive and tolerant face to the world."

In fact, Madrid is determined to use the US-instigated coup in Venezuela to carve out a new role for Spanish imperialism in its former colonies in South America. It fears that Spain is falling behind its rivals in the new redivision of the world.

Carlos Malamud, chief analyst on South America for the think-tank Instituto Elcano, wrote: "with a highly fragmented Latin America, Spain must have a stronger Latin American policy ... If other countries, whether European or not, have increased in recent years their presence in some specific countries of Latin America, it has been because they have taken sides and deepened certain alliances to the detriment of others."

The PSOE, like other EU governments, is ruthlessly pursuing regime change to advance its imperialist interests. According to Spain's Ministry of Commerce, 100 Spanish companies operate in Venezuela, including major corporations like Telefónica, Mapfre, Repsol, BBVA, Duro Felguera, Zara and others. Spain is the second-largest European investor in Venezuela after the Netherlands. In 2015, Spain's direct investments in Venezuela were €21.3 billion.

Madrid's actions are so brazen that even former PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero felt compelled to admit that Madrid's "obsession against the Government of Venezuela corresponds to economic interests."

These economic interests have shaped the policies of the entire Spanish ruling class since the fall of the fascist Francoite dictatorship in 1978. The ensuing PSOE government of Felipe González, who now staunchly defends regime change in Venezuela, supported in 1989 his close friend, Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, as he unleashed the army on mass protests against International Monetary Fund austerity programmes. This led to 3,000 deaths in what is known as the "Caracazo."

González's deputy prime minister from 1982 to 1991, Alfonso Guerra, recently endorsed the bloody US-backed Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, claiming it was more "effective" than the Maduro regime.

In 2002, the PP government supported a US-led coup that briefly ousted Chavez, and pressed other countries to endorse US State Department calls for recognition of Pedro Carmona's "transitional government."

Millions of workers and youth in Spain are appalled by the US- and European-backed coup in Venezuela. To oppose it, however, requires fighting the pseudo-left Podemos party, which sets out to demobilise all opposition to Spanish and European imperialism.

Before the coup, top figures of Podemos, whose founders were advisors to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, were distancing themselves from the "Bolivarian" regime they once enthusiastically endorsed. Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias said he no longer "shared" the opinions he had formulated in the past on Venezuela. Iñigo Errejón said the same to *El País*.

When Guaidó proclaimed himself president, Podemos spokeswoman Irene Montero asked Sánchez to call for dialogue instead of "following Donald Trump." Spain and the EU, she said, "should lead the positions of mediation and respect for the processes in Venezuela that guarantee a dialogue, negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict." Similarly, EU MP and Pabloite leader Miguel Urbán criticised the EU parliament resolution, as the "EU should be a mediator in this conflict."

Podemos's reactionary line not only aims to suppress social opposition to imperialism but also reflects sections of the Spanish ruling class who fear that the current aggressive regime change in Venezuela will trigger civil war, wiping out Spain's investments there.

This crisis is a new exposure of Podemos and its alliance with the PSOE. They are tools of the European bourgeoisie as it joins Washington in ruthlessly pursuing regime change in Venezuela.

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