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## Understanding the Colombian Civil War

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to review the profile and causes of the Colombian conflict, to shed light on the context in which the current events on the Colombian battlefields are occurring and therefore, to bring attention to the fact that the conflict cannot be resolved merely with brute military force what has, with the successes of Uribe government's anti-guerrilla campaigns, become a general opinion. It is also an objective of this article to set a foundation upon which some further critical approach analysis of the Colombian armed conflict can be built.

*Key words:* Colombia, paramilitary forces, guerilla warfare, criminal organizations, drug.

The recent successes of the Colombian armed forces against the leftist rebels, mainly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP)) and the establishment of new paramilitary formations such as *Águilas Negras*, *Rastrojos*, *Los Paisas* and others have again drawn media attention to the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia. In mass media and in the academic sphere as well insurgents are often portrayed as yet another of the many criminal gangs active in Colombia or at best as narco-terrorists. While it is true that *modus operandi* of these groups includes terrorist attacks and that their activities are mainly funded through criminal activities, such classification can only derive from a lack of understanding of the subject or/and political intentions to further denigrate the insurgents and to praise Colombian government that is itself not far from being criminal, on other hand. The conflict in Colombia is a

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complex and a long-lasting one and it cannot simply be dismissed with a good versus evil scenario.

The methodology used in this analysis is based on the conflict analysis methodology developed by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) in cooperation with a broad consortium of other non-governmental organizations that was published in 2004. IDRC (2004) suggests that a comprehensive conflict analysis should encompass profile, root causes, actors and dynamics of the conflict. As it is not the intention of this article to build a full analysis of the conflict in Colombia, but merely to bring attention to root causes that ought to be addressed by policy makers on field, only the profile and root causes of the conflict are analyzed. The chapter on the profile of the conflict defines the type of conflict in Colombia and warring parties, sets background to the current conflict and examines the casualties of the conflict and its conflict intensity. What follows is the chapter about the root causes of the conflict in which the structural causes, proximate causes and triggers are examined. The findings of the profile and root cause analysis are then combined in the conclusion, which seeks to propose some general guidelines both for future policy making and further academic research about the conflict in Colombia.

Addressing the root causes of the conflict ought to be the primary concern of those striving towards finding the resolutions for it. While it is true that the root causes such as poverty and inequality are themselves not enough for an internal conflict to take place as McDougall points out, solving merely the problems of state weakness and others that form objective conditions under which an armed rebellion can take place can only transform forms of violence as Leech proves on the case of El Salvador.<sup>2</sup> The peace accords that ended the civil war in El Salvador in 1992 failed to address the socio-economic roots of the conflict and although the rebel forces were demobilized surrendering their arms, the economic situation forced many of the former guerrillas as well as soldiers to turn to violent criminal activities in order to survive. “Ten years after the end of civil conflict, the number of killings in El Salvador was comparable to the worst years of that countries civil war”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alex McDougall, “State Power and Implications for Civil War in Colombia”, *State in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (4), 2009, p. 327.

Garry Leech, “The War on Terror in Colombia”, *Colombia Journal*, New York, 2004, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Profile

Colombia measures 1.138.910 km<sup>2</sup> and has an exceptional strategic position.<sup>4</sup> It is the only South American country adjacent both to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Its position makes it “a throat” of communication and transportation lines between South and Central American countries. In the north, it borders Panama lying in the proximity of the Panama Canal, while in the east it borders Venezuela, a country with the largest proven oil reserves in the Americas. Its main physical features are the Andes and the lowlands. Valleys and basins of the three Andes chains, all of which have a general south-north orientation, are where the most of the Colombian population is concentrated. This is also the part of the county with fairly good land traffic connections and relatively cool climate. Hot tropical climate is typical for Colombian lowlands, which extend over almost two-thirds of the country and are, with the exception of the costal Caribbean region, very scarcely populated. In these lowlands, rivers are a dominant feature of both the physical and human landscapes of the region. Majority of the lowland population is settled on the riverbanks while rivers are often the only possible access lines to these regions.

“Colombia’s geography proved to be a major obstacle to state building”, especially in the scarcely populated lowlands.<sup>5</sup> The Colombian state never managed to establish effective control in these parts of the country. Most attempts of establishing legitimate and permanent state presence failed due to the lack of required financial and human resources as well as the lack of support from the local population with no experience of state as an impartial dispenser of justice. Meanwhile, the rural elites found state presence to be either unnecessary or undesirable and urban elites lacked motivation for making an effort necessary to alter this situation. To this day, few traffic connections between Colombia’s hinterlands and the capital city exist and rural communities still live in semi-isolation from the daily state politics and economy.<sup>6</sup> Within Colombia, the difference in road density between various departments is enormous. According to data presented by Ramirez et. al. and Herbst that measures road density in the selected Colombian Departments, Quindico had the highest road density of 0.113 km/km, while Vaupes and Cesnare had road density of only 0,003 km/ km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Heavy terrain, dense tropical forest, hot

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<sup>4</sup> CIA – The World Factbook, *Colombia*. Retrieved July 19, 2010, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

<sup>5</sup> Alex McDougall, “State Power and Implications for Civil War in Colombia”, *State in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (4), 2009, p. 328.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 329.

<sup>7</sup> Alex McDougall, “State Power and Implications for Civil War in Colombia”, *State in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (4), 2009, p. 330.

climate conditions, lack of roads, small state presence and porous borders make these areas a guerrilla warfare paradise.

### *Type of Conflict*

Classifying conflict is always a difficult task, due to a great number of definitions of war, civil war, armed conflict and other states of war that appear in the world. Uppsala Conflict Data Program defines an armed conflict as a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.<sup>8</sup> Although the intensity of conflict in Colombia varied since its beginning in 1964, it has always fallen under the Uppsala Conflict Data Program definition. But, the conflict in Colombia is also often regarded as civil war, although the Colombian government ferociously renounces such a classification as it regards insurgents as common criminals or terrorists and not as warring parties. Small and Singer define civil war as “any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides.”<sup>9</sup> Sambanis dismisses this definition as being “deceptively straightforward”<sup>10</sup> and then through analysis of various intrastate conflicts defines eight criteria a conflict must fulfil in order to be defined as civil war.<sup>11</sup> Conflict in Colombia fulfils all the required

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<sup>8</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program. *UCDP Definitions*. Retrieved from [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data\\_and\\_publications/definitions\\_all.htm](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data_and_publications/definitions_all.htm) July 20, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Melvin Small, David Singer, *Resort to arms: International and civil war, 1816-1980*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA, 1982, p.210.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48 (6), 2004, pp. 816.

<sup>11</sup> “An armed conflict should be classified as civil war if: (a) The war takes place within the territory of a state that is a member of the international system with a population of 500,000 or greater, (b) The parties are politically and militarily organized, and they have publicly stated political objectives, (c) The government (through its military or militias) must be a principal combatant. If there is no functioning government, then the party representing the government internationally and/or claiming the state domestically must be involved as a combatant, (d) The main insurgent organization(s) must be locally represented and must recruit locally. Additional external involvement and recruitment need not imply that the war is not intrastate. Insurgent groups may operate from neighboring countries, but they must also have some territorial control (bases) in the civil war country and/or the rebels must reside in the civil war country, (e) The start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths. If the conflict has not caused 500 deaths or more in the first year, the war is coded as having started in that year only if cumulative deaths in the next 3 years reach 1,000, (f) Throughout its duration, the conflict must be characterized by

criteria. The number of battle-related deaths from the early years of war can only be estimated today. The intensity of the conflict throughout its history has varied, as has the number of inflicted deaths to the government by insurgents, which has been very low in the last few years, probably under the required 100 mark. However, the conflict fulfils all other requirement proposed by Sambonis. Due to the political organization of the warring parties and utilization of violence as means to further political goals, both on the side of the government and insurgents, the conflict can therefore be classified as a civil war, although it is true that sometimes numerical requirements required by some academics in order to classify a conflict as such, are not met.

### *Warring parties*

For decades, Colombia has been ravaged by a civil war between the Colombian government and several non-state actors. The latter are divided into two broad groups — left wing insurgents/guerrillas and right wing paramilitaries. Throughout the history, many different guerrilla groups were formed and many have already been disbanded such as the M-19 group and indigenous guerrilla formations. The largest insurgent groups however, the FARC-EP<sup>12</sup> and the

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sustained violence, at least at the minor or intermediate level. There should be no 3-year period during which the conflict causes fewer than 500 deaths, (g) Throughout the war, the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance. Effective resistance is measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party. A substantial number of these deaths must occur in the first year of the war.<sup>4</sup> But if the violence becomes effectively one-sided, even if the aggregate effective-resistance threshold of 100 deaths has already been met, the civil war must be coded as having ended, and a politicide or other form of one-sided violence must be coded as having started, (h) A peace treaty that produces at least 6 months of peace marks an end to the war, (i) A decisive military victory by the rebels that produces a new regime should mark the end of the war. Because civil war is understood as an armed conflict against the government, continuing armed conflict against a new government implies a new civil war. If the government wins the war, a period of peace longer than 6 months must persist before we code a new war (see also criterion k)” (Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48 (6), 2004, pp. 829-30).

<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of its existence, FARC had about 350 members (International Crisis Group. (2002). Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace. *Latin America Report N°1*. Retrieved, from [http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en/001\\_colombias\\_elusive\\_quest\\_for\\_peace.pdf](http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en/001_colombias_elusive_quest_for_peace.pdf), July 20, 2010, p.3). At peak of its power in 2002 FARC-EP numbered about 26,000 combatants. This number was then drastically reduced by government anti-guerrilla campaigns; however in 2010 FARC-EP still has an estimated 8,000 men and women under arms (International Crisis Group. (2010). Improving Security Policy in Colombia. *Latin America Briefing* No 23, 2010 Retrieved, from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/B23%20Improving%20Security%20Policy%20in%20Colombia.ashx>, July 21, 2010, p.77).

National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN)),<sup>13</sup> have persisted to this day. There is also a very small Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL)); however, not much is known about it. Paramilitary groups are also not a cohesive group. They had been formed as self-defence units by large landowners to protect themselves against guerrilla attack and many of them later formed close alliances with the drug cartels, notably the Medellín cartel. In the 1990s they formed a loose coalition of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC)), but the group was demobilized in 2006 after reaching a successful demobilization agreement with the government in 2003. Since then new paramilitary groups have appeared and the International Crisis Group (2010, 9) identifies them as *Rastrojos*, Popular Revolutionary Anti-Subversive Army of Colombia (*Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antisubversivo de Colombia* (ERPAC)), *Los Paisas*, *Los Urabeños* and *Águilas Negras*. Although they are much smaller in number than the former AUC,<sup>14</sup> being often dismissed merely as criminal gangs and much more fragmented than the former AUC, they are, nevertheless, gradually becoming a warring party in the conflict.

### *Background to the conflict*

The current state of war in Colombia has its roots in the period named La Violencia when the Liberal and Conservative Parties were engaged in the civil war. La Violencia, which caused approximately 200,000 deaths started with the assassination of liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April 1948 in Bogotá.<sup>15</sup> Mass unrests, rioting and looting that erupted after the assassination were brutally repressed by the government and an estimated that 2,000 people were killed in the crackdown. After the crackdown, the Conservative Government

<sup>13</sup> ELN had about 5,000 members at its peak in the mid-1990s (International Crisis Group, 2002: p. 10). Today their number is estimated at around 3,000 (James Hackett, ed.). *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2010, p.77).

<sup>14</sup> When demobilized in 2006, AUC numbered about 32,000 men. Today's emergent criminal bands, remnants of the AUC, number about 3,500 men (The Military Balance, 2010, p. 77).

<sup>15</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program, *La Violencia' and the start of left-wing guerrillas*. Retrieved, from [http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern\\_Americas#](http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern_Americas#) July 20, 2010.

Garry Leech, "The War on Terror in Colombia", *Colombia Journal*, New York, 2004, p.21. Linda Robinson, "Guerrillas in the Mist", *The New Republic*, 221 (10), 1999, pp. 21-2. Retrieved July 20, 2010, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.nukweb.nuk.uni-lj.si/ehost/detail?vid=4&hid=110&sid=2d109657-efaf-49bb-a471-04f226e24ff8%40sessionmgr104&bdata=Jmxhbm9c2wmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZlJnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#db=a9h&AN=12441396>, p. 22.

headed by Mariano Ospina Pérez became even more authoritarian than before Gaitán's assassination. As of March 1949, all public rallies were banned, in May of the same year all liberal governors were fired and in November, the parliament was disbanded.<sup>16</sup> In cooperation with the Communists, the Liberals began waging an armed struggle against the Conservatives. They organized "self-defence" groups that were later transformed into peasant guerrilla forces.<sup>17</sup>

The presidential elections of 1949 were boycotted by the liberals and as a result, Laureano Gómez, the only remaining candidate, took office in 1950. He broadened powers of the presidency and curtailed civilian liberties as part of an effort to confront mounting violence in the country. "Pro-labor laws passed in the 1930s were cancelled by executive decree, independent labor unions were struck down, congressional elections were held without opposition, the press was censored, courts were controlled by the executive, and freedom of worship was challenged as mobs attacked Protestant chapels".<sup>18</sup> In 1953, after five years of fighting, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla ousted Gómez in a widely supported *coup d'état* and then unsuccessfully tried to initiate a popular movement, similar to that of Juan Perón in Argentina. In 1957, he was forced to resign due to the general strike and strong opposition to his rule. Five-member military junta, composed of Liberals and Conservatives took over.<sup>19</sup> But even before that happened, the Liberals and the Conservatives had faced with the dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla and struck political agreements in Sitges (Spain) and San Carlos "which sought to reduce inter-party tensions and provide a basis for power-sharing between the parties".<sup>20</sup> The National Front, a common body of both Conservatives and Liberals, was created and agreements became constitutional amendments.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Karen M. Sturges-Vera, "La Violencia". In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W Meditz, (eds.). *Colombia: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington, 1990. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/22.htm>, July 20, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace. *Latin America Report N°1*. 2002 Retrieved, from [http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en/001\\_colombias\\_elusive\\_quest\\_for\\_peace.pdf](http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en/001_colombias_elusive_quest_for_peace.pdf), July 20, 2010, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Karen M. Sturges-Vera, "La Violencia". In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.). *Colombia: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/22.htm>, July 20, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace. *Latin America Report N°1*. 2002, Retrieved, from [http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F87361101A37CC158/en/001\\_colombias\\_elusive\\_quest\\_for\\_peace.pdf](http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F87361101A37CC158/en/001_colombias_elusive_quest_for_peace.pdf), July 20, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Karen M. Sturges-Vera, "The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship". In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.). *Colombia: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington. 1990. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/23.htm>. July 20, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The National Front brought relative peace in the country, but eliminated all other political opposition. With the Liberals now on the government side, the remaining Communist rebels became the priority target of the government.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, violence continued although on the smaller scale than before. Immediately after the constitution of the National Front some fractions of Liberals, but mainly Communists, opposed exclusive political system that was formed and refused to disarm. In 1964, an estimated 100 armed groups were still active. In the same year, the Colombian government conducted a brutal attack on the self-proclaimed Republic of Marquetalia in today's department of Caldas, which marked the beginning of the current civil war in Colombia. Although rebels were defeated in Marquetalia, their core managed to survive and regroup. In the same year, a group of Colombian students, which returned from Cuba, established the ELN,<sup>23</sup> while the remnant rebel groups that survived Marquetalia formed the core of the FARC, which was formally established two years later.<sup>24</sup>

### *Number of casualties*

There are no reliable statistics on the number of people that have been killed in the Colombian civil war since 1964. No official statistics exist and academic sources use different methodologies that are often not disclosed. What follows is some of the data on casualties of the Colombian civil war that will be presented in order to form a broad picture of the level of violence in that war.

Ploughshares (2009) puts the total number of killed anywhere between 50,000 and 200,000, which includes some 40,000 since 1990.<sup>25</sup> Restepo and Spagat put the number of killed and injured in a period between 1988 and 2003 at a little over 50,000, out of which about 25,000 were combatants and the rest civilians.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program, *La Violencia' and the start of left-wing guerrillas*. Retrieved from [http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern\\_Americas#](http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern_Americas#) July 20, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Mark W. Chernick, "Conflict in Colombia: An Analysis and Perspectives for Peace". In: Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace. Bern, 2003, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program, *La Violencia' and the start of left-wing guerrillas*. Retrieved from [http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern\\_Americas#](http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=35&regionSelect=5-Southern_Americas#) July 20, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Project Ploughshares, *Armed Conflicts Report: Colombia (1964 - first combat deaths)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-Colombia.html>, July 20, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Restepo, J., Michael S., *Civilian Casualties in the Colombian Conflict: A New Approach to Human Security*, University of London, London, 2004, p.14.

McDougall estimates that the FARC-EP killed an average of 500 soldiers annually in the 1980s and an average of 1,000 in the 1990s, while an average of 2.2 guerrillas were killed for every Colombian soldier by 1989 and an average of 1.52 by 1999.<sup>27</sup> The problem with estimating the number of casualties in the Colombian civil war is that many people have been killed in gun battles that are not war related, but are a result of rampant urban criminal violence. Leech puts the annual number of violent deaths at 28,000 out of which only 22% come as a result of the conflict being waged by various armed groups.<sup>28</sup>

Very specific casualty groups are mine victims. According to Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor,<sup>29</sup> 6,696 mine related casualties were reported in Colombia between 1999 and 2008.<sup>30</sup> In 2008 alone, 160 people were killed (44 civilians) and 617 were injured (212 civilians).<sup>31</sup>

### *Conflict intensity*

Graph 1.6.1 that is based on the data of Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research shows the conflict intensity between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, ELN and Paramilitaries. The conflicts between non-state actors also exist, especially between right wing paramilitaries and left wing insurgents, while in the past the former often collaborated with the government in anti-guerrilla operations. The ELN and FARC-EP also sometimes fight each other over territory. However, these conflicts are of minor importance for security in Colombia, especially since demobilization of the

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<sup>27</sup> Alex McDougall, "State Power and Implications for Civil War in Colombia", *State in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (4), 2009, pp.337.

<sup>28</sup> Garry Leech, "The War on Terror in Colombia", *Colombia Journal*, New York, 2004, p.21.

<sup>29</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor, *Casualties and Data Collection*, 2009, Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2009/es/mine\\_casualties.html#casualties\\_from\\_1999%E2%80%932008](http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2009/es/mine_casualties.html#casualties_from_1999%E2%80%932008).

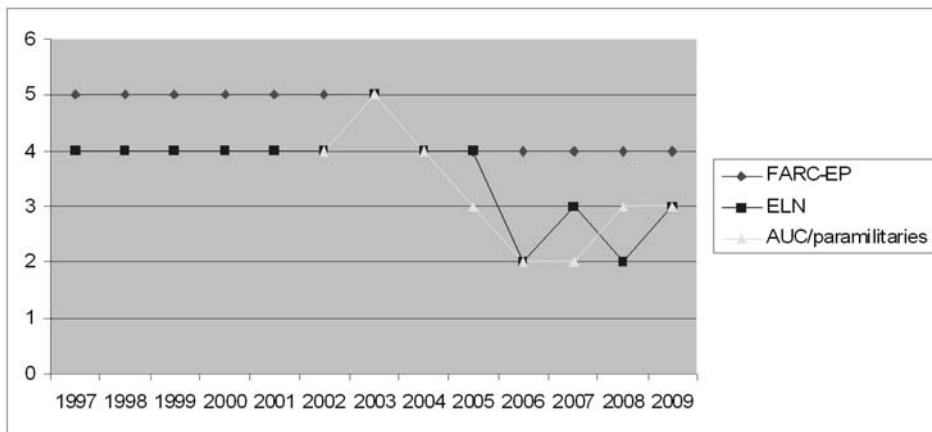
<sup>30</sup> Only Afghanistan and Cambodia had greater number of mine victims in that period.

<sup>31</sup> In the last decade non-state actors in the conflict, most notably the FARC-EP, have increased use and production of anti-personnel mines throughout the country, while the Republic of Colombia became a party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 2001 and completed the destruction of 18,531 stockpiled antipersonnel mines in 2004 (Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor 2009). However, prior to signing the Mine Ban Treaty, the government forces laid approximately 20,000 anti-personnel mines throughout the country, mostly for perimeter defense, and in 2009 an estimated 150,000 m<sup>2</sup> around 18 military bases remained to be contaminated with anti-personnel mines, while the number of contamination in civilian areas is unknown (Landmine and Cluster munitions monitor 2009). Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor, *Colombia: 2008 Key Data*, 2009. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.themonitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs\\_year=2009&pqs\\_type=lm&pqs\\_report=colombia](http://www.themonitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2009&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=colombia).

AUC, when compared to conflicts of state vs. non-state armed groups. Therefore, only intensity of those conflicts will be presented.

Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research<sup>32</sup> defines five stages of conflict intensity and they are as follows: latent conflict,<sup>33</sup> manifest conflict,<sup>34</sup> crisis,<sup>35</sup> severe crisis<sup>36</sup> and war.<sup>37</sup>

*Graph 1: Conflict intensity of government vs. non-state actors*



Sources: Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict

Legend: 5 = war, 4 = Severe Crisis; 3 = Crisis; 2 = Manifest Conflict; 1 = Latent Conflict.

<sup>32</sup> Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, *Conflict Barometer 2002*, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, 2002, p.2.

<sup>33</sup> “A positional difference on definable values of national meaning is considered to be a latent conflict if respective demands are articulated by one of the parties and perceived by the other as such” (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, *Conflict Barometer 2002*, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, 2002, p. 2).

<sup>34</sup> “A manifest conflict includes the use of measures that are located in the fore field of violent force. This concerns for example verbal pressure, threatening publicly with violence, or the imposition of economic sanctions” (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2002, p. 2). Please note, that before 2002 this category did not exist in Conflict barometers issued by Heidelberg Institute.

<sup>35</sup> “A crisis is a tense situation in which at least one of the parties uses violent force in single incidents” (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2002, p. 2).

<sup>36</sup> “A conflict is considered to be a severe crisis if violent force is repeatedly used in an organized way” (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2002, p. 2).

<sup>37</sup> “Wars are a type of violent conflicts in which violent force is used with a certain continuity in an organized and systematic way. The conflict parties apply extensive measures, according to the situation. The amount of destruction is vast and of long duration” (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2002, p. 2).

The conflict intensity between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government has been on the level of war until 2004, when the intensity of the conflict was lowered to severe crisis due to the successes of President Alvaro Uribe's fierce anti-guerrilla campaigns and has since then remained on that level. International Crisis Group observes that although the FARC-EP has been severely weakened during the Uribe's presidency, it has effectively adapted to the new situation on the battleground and is far from being defeated.<sup>38</sup> We can therefore, expect that the intensity of the conflict between the government and the FARC-EP will probably remain on the same level in the following years.

Uribe's election in 2002 and the commencement of his anti-guerrilla campaigns escalated the conflict with the ELN to a full scale in 2003. After defeats on field, the ELN lost its strength and as a consequence, the intensity fell first to a severe crisis level in 2004 and 2005, when the ELN engaged in peace talks with the government and then consequently fell to a level of manifest conflict in 2006. It has again reached the level of crisis in 2007, when the peace talks were terminated without a deal being reached and then again in 2009. Unless the ELN recovers its strength, the intensity of the conflict between the ELN and the government will probably remain on the same level. The conflict between the government and paramilitaries (then the AUC) also escalated to war in 2003, probably due to the government anti-drug campaigns, but already that year a demobilization agreement was signed between the AUC and the government and consequently, the conflict was steadily losing its intensity until 2006, when the AUC ceased to exist and the conflict intensity reached a level of manifest conflict. Since then new right-wing paramilitary formations, mostly remnants of the AUC that refused to demobilize, have been formatted and have steadily been rising both in number and presence throughout Colombia. The conflict between these new paramilitaries and the government has again reached a level of crisis in 2008 and has remained on that level in 2009.

### **Root causes of conflict**

International Crisis Group states "unequal distribution of land and wealth, expulsion of poor farmers to the country's agricultural frontier where the state

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<sup>38</sup> FARC-EP has been able to increase the number of attack between 2008 and 2009 and so reversed the general trend of diminishing number of attack during Uribe's administration (International Crisis Group, Improving Security Policy in Colombia, *Latin America Briefing No 23*, 2010, retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/B23%20Improving%20Security%20Policy%20in%20Colombia.ashx>, July 21, 2010. p. 3).

was weak or absent and a deeply-rooted tradition of violence” as some of the reasons that “sparked the conflict and explain its persistence over decades.”<sup>39</sup> United Church of Canada states similar reasons for the outbreak of current civil war in the 1960s: “social injustice, unequal distribution of land, concentration of political power and wealth and the impossibility of implementing real alternatives through democratic means.”<sup>40</sup> Chernick attributes historical reasons for the outbreak of civil war to economic, political and social patterns of exclusion that are typical for Latin America, while Gray, through an analysis of the war in Colombia, identifies six factors that he sees as causes of war and its continuation — economic causes, state weakness, landscape, U.S. policies, duration of violence and opportunism of non-state actors.<sup>41</sup>

Velásquez differs between historical causes and factors that have influenced escalation and continuation of the conflict. Historical causes are social, economic and political exclusions, as well as the Colombian tradition of attaining political objectives through violence.<sup>42</sup> Coupled with the authoritarian political culture these causes set conditions for the outbreak of the conflict. External and internal factors have then contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Foreign factors were the following: the Cold war and its influences on national security doctrines, the Cuban revolution and the Sino-Soviet rupture; while domestic factors were the following: restricted democracy under the National Front, political radicalization of labour unions and youth groups, especially students, remnants of the liberal guerrilla groups from the period of La Violencia.<sup>43</sup> Other factors that later contributed to the continuation and escalation of the conflict surfaced such as drug trafficking, collapse of the justice system as element for regulating social behaviour, lack of confidence as

<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia”, *Latin America Report No 11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx), p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> United Church of Canada, *Colombia: A country of Paradoxes*, 2009. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.united-church.ca/files/getinvolved/unitedforpeace/advocacy\\_colombiabackgrounder.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/getinvolved/unitedforpeace/advocacy_colombiabackgrounder.pdf), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Mark W. Chernick, “Conflict in Colombia: An Analysis and Perspectives for Peace”. In: Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace. Bern, 2003, p. 13.

Gray, Vanessa Joan, “The New Research on Civil Wars: Does It Help Us Understand the Colombian Conflict?”, *Latin American Politics & Society*. 50 (3), 2008, pp. 63–91.

<sup>42</sup> Alberto V. Velásquez, “The Colombian Armed Conflict: Analysis and Perspectives”. In: Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace, Bern, 2003 p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Karen M. Sturges-Vera, “La Violencia”. In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.). *Colombia: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/22.htm>, July 20, 2010.

a value of social cohesion and delinquent and corrupt behaviour of government administrations.<sup>44</sup>

The most important factor that influenced the course of the war was undoubtedly drug trafficking, which started to flourish in the 1970s. It is, however, a grave simplification to reduce the causes of the war merely to it. The first impact of drug trafficking on the war had been the rise and evolution of the right-wing paramilitary formations that at the beginning served mostly as the protection for large landowners and drug lords from the attacks of left-wing guerrillas. In the 1980s drug trafficking also started to gain importance for the guerrillas, who found in it a source of finance for the struggle they were waging against the government.<sup>45</sup> Government officials, too, were often involved in the drug business,<sup>46</sup> apparently even former president Alvaro Uribe who in 1991, while still serving as a senator, was ranked 82nd of 100 most influential drug lords in Colombia by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency in one of its top secret reports, now available on the internet.<sup>47</sup>

From the above, the root causes of the conflict as defined by International Crisis Group can be identified.<sup>48</sup> They are as follows: structural causes that created preconditions for the violent conflict, proximity causes or factors that further escalated and deepened the conflict, also, what they call “triggers,” which are single acts that will set and escalate a conflict.<sup>49</sup> The attack of the government forces on the Republic of Marquetalia mentioned in the Chapter 1.4 *Background to Conflict* could be regarded as a trigger. But, there have been no such triggers in recent years. For this reason, only structural and proximity causes will be defined in continuation.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia”, *Latin America Report N°11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx). p. 4; Chernick, Mark W., “Conflict in Colombia: An Analysis and Perspectives for Peace”. In: Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace. Bern, 2003, pp. 13–7; Garry Leech, “The War on Terror in Colombia”, *Colombia Journal*, New York, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> See subchapter Drug Trafficking.

<sup>47</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, *Colombian Narco Trafficker Profiles*, 23. September 1991. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB131/dia910923.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> International Crisis Group, “Improving Security Policy in Colombia”, *Latin America Briefing No 23*, 2010, retrieved, from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/B23%20Improving%20Security%20Policy%20in%20Colombia.ashx>, July 21, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

### *Structural causes*

Structural causes of the civil war in Colombia are of political, economic and social nature. Among political issues the most burning are political exclusiveness, formed with the National Front in 1958, and weak state presence on the most part of Colombian territory, while the question of agrarian reform, vast development discrepancies between urban and rural environment, tendency of attaining political objectives through violence and especially poverty and income inequality are the main socio-economic causes.

### *Political causes*

In 1958, the National Front had established an exclusive political system in which power alternated between the Liberal and Conservative Parties that were the only two ones allowed to participate in elections. Regardless of the election results, the ruling party always shared some of its power with the other party. Such a system was constitutionally set at the end of La Violencia and lasted until 1974. The only legal way of political participation and opposition by dissident groups was through formation of “movements” that “challenged the establishment by presenting candidates under the Liberal or Conservative labels”.<sup>50</sup> The underground opposition that served as a foundation for the creation of left-wing guerrilla groups was a logical reaction to such a political system. The constitutional reforms of 1968 marked the beginning of the end of the National Front, and the presidential elections of 1974 and the local elections of 1976 returned the normal inter-party competition to Colombia. But, even though the election system was now open for all parties to participate, voter turnout was low<sup>51</sup> and the Liberal and Conservative parties retained majority of seats in the parliament.<sup>52</sup> A new constitution, enacted in 1991, broadened civil liberties and set up bodies such as Human Rights Ombudsman and Constitutional Court.<sup>53</sup> It did not, however, in any way changed the existing political system. 2002 was the first year since 1958 that a presidential candidate, not belonging to either the

<sup>50</sup> Karen M. Sturges-Vera, “Opposition to the National Front”. In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.), *Colombia: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington, 1990. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Front\\_%28Colombia%29#Creation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Front_%28Colombia%29#Creation).

<sup>51</sup> Voter turnout on parliamentary elections after the abolishment of National Front only three times surpassed 50 %: in 1970 (51.9 %), 1974 (57.1 %) and 1990 (55.3 %) (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral, Assistance 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Rex A. Hudson, “Post-National Front Political Developments”. In: Denis M. Hanratty, Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.). *Colombia: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington. Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/22.htm>, July 20, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2010. *Background Note: Colombia*, Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm>.

Conservative or the Liberal Party, was elected president. Álvaro Uribe Vélez was elected in the first round of election with 53.04 % at 46.45 % of voter turnout.<sup>54</sup> In his election platform he promised a tougher approach to the illegal armed groups that operated in Colombia and vowed not to negotiate with them until they declared truce and disarmed.<sup>55</sup> In 2005, the Constitutional Court confirmed the decision of the Congress adopted in 2004 to allow Uribe to run for a second term.<sup>56</sup> In 2006, Uribe was again elected president, this time with 62.35 % at 45.05 voter turnout.<sup>57</sup> Although Uribe tried to amend the Constitution to allow him to run for the third term, the Constitutional Court rejected his plea. Therefore, in 2010, Juan Manuel Santos, former defence minister in Uribe's government was elected president in the second round with 69 % of votes at a low voter turnout.<sup>58</sup>

The Colombian political system is riddled with corruption on all levels. The Organization Transparencia por Colombia, a national branch of Transparency International, estimates that a high or very high levels of corruption are present in at least half of Colombia's regional institutions, while the low level of public accountability is typical for the whole public sector. Corruption was proven again in late 2006 when the so-called "para" scandal broke out. Hard evidence that proved the entanglement of more than fifty high ranking politicians in drug trafficking and collaboration with the paramilitaries was provided by the Colombian prosecuting authorities. The scandal forced many of the high ranking officials to resign, such as Uribe's Foreign Minister, Head of the Administrative Department of Security (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS)), Colombia's main intelligence service, and many high ranking officers of the Colombian Armed Forces,<sup>59</sup> among whom was even chief of the general staff, General Mario Montoya.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Election Profile: Colombia*, 2002. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=441>.

<sup>55</sup> Connie Veillette, "Plan Colombia: A Progress Report", *CRS Report for Congress*, 2005. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/48382.pdf>, p.2.

William F. Pérez, *An Effective Strategy for Colombia: A Potential End to the Current Crisis*, Strategy Research Project, Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 2004, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> Before this ruling presidents were allowed to serve only one four year mandate.

<sup>57</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems. *Election Profile for Colombia – Results*. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=1011>.

<sup>58</sup> Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Juan Manuel Santos wins Colombia presidential election", *Guardian*, June 21. 2010. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/21/juan-manuel-santos-colombia-president>.

<sup>59</sup> International Crisis Group, "Colombia's New Armed Groups", *Latin America Report N°20*. 2007. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/20\\_colombia\\_s\\_new\\_armed\\_groups.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/20_colombia_s_new_armed_groups.ashx), p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> BBC News, *Colombian army commander resigns*, November 4. 2008. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7709073.stm>.

The low voter turnout, corruption and collaboration with the illegal right-wing paramilitary formations shed bad light on the legitimacy of state institutions when coping with state problems and prove that political exclusion in one form or another is still present in the Colombian society. Most Colombians do not have much confidence in the existing political system or simply believe that nothing will change, no matter who is in power. That creates political passiveness, especially among the lower class.

### *Socio-economic causes*

Since the 1970s, Colombia had a steady 4 to 5 % annual economic growth, with an exception of small recession in 1998 and 1999 when GDP fell by about 4 %.<sup>61</sup> In 2009, the Colombian GDP *per capita* was 9.200 USD, down from 9.300 in 2010, due to the global economic crisis.<sup>62</sup>

Irrespectively to relatively good economic development indicators mentioned above, Colombia remains a country of high levels of poverty and inequality. The World Bank estimates that in 1978 approximately 80 % of its population lived in poverty, 65 % in 1988, 60% in 1995 and 64% in 1999.<sup>63</sup> In 2006, the government estimated that 49.2 % of the population lived in poverty, while Colombian non-governmental organizations put the number at 70%.<sup>64</sup> The Embassy of Sweden quotes the government estimates for 2005 when 46.8 % of the population was supposed to live in poverty, and at the same time brings attention to high differences in poverty levels between urban and rural areas, 46.7 % and 69%, respectively. The data provided by the World Bank shows that in 1978 70% of the urban and 94% of the rural population lived in poverty, while the ratio between the urban and rural poor was 55% to 79 % in 1999.<sup>65</sup> The Colombian government ratio estimates for 2003 were 46.7 % to 69 %. Gómez et. al. also notice vast discrepancies between

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<sup>61</sup> World Bank, *Colombia Poverty Report*, 2002. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946\\_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf), pp. 3-4

<sup>62</sup> CIA – The World Factbook, *Colombia*. Retrieved July 19, 2010, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>.

<sup>63</sup> World Bank, *Colombia Poverty Report*, 2002. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946\\_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf). p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Helda Martinez, “Colombia: Poverty — the Old, the New and the Newest”, *Inter Press Service News Agency*, October 16. 2006. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35118>.

<sup>65</sup> World Bank, *Colombia Poverty Report*, 2002. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946\\_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/04/23/000094946_0304090401521/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf), p. 12.

urban and rural areas in the access to education and public services, unemployment, infant mortality rates, literacy rate, the access to safe drinking water and many others.<sup>66</sup> The Embassy of Sweden estimated Chocó to be the most critical of the provinces in Colombia, while its socio-economic indicators were much closer to those of the poorest countries in the world than to the Colombian average.

Even more critical than the number of poor in Colombia is the income inequality. The World Development Bank puts the Gini coefficient at 58.5, which makes Colombia a country with the sixth most unequal distribution of wealth among 141 countries for which data is provided.<sup>67</sup> In 2003, 20 % of the wealthiest Colombians earned 62.67 % of all incomes, while the poorest 20% only earned 2.48 %.<sup>68</sup> Another problem is connected to land ownership that is seen as a symbol of prestige in most Latin American countries. In 1996, 60.5 % (compared to 29 % in 1960) of productive land was concentrated in hands of less than 1% of landholders, while on other side of the spectrum 66% of landholders owned about 3 % (compared to 6 % in 1960).<sup>69</sup>

Poverty, rural underdevelopment and income inequality are main features of the Colombian daily life, which together with political exclusivity and political passiveness of majority of the population, form structural causes of the conflict in Colombia. They were present in the 1960s when the war broke out and they are still present today. Some of these problems are even worse today than they were in 1960s.

### *Proximate causes*

Among proximate causes, we can count numerous violations of human rights and international laws of armed conflict that are perpetrated by all warring parties. Most obvious are undoubtedly extrajudicial killing, massacres and harassments as well as displacements of civilian population.<sup>70</sup> These are the

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<sup>66</sup> Alfredo Sarmiento Gómez, Lucía Mina Rosero, Carlos Alonso Malaver, Sandra Álvarez Toro., *Colombia: Human Development Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals*, United Nations Development Programme, 2003.

<sup>67</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2009*. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/161.html>.

<sup>68</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 2007. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/table2\\_7.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/table2_7.pdf), p.66.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Jelsma, "Conflict, Sustainable Development, and the Illegal Drug Economy in Colombia: An Analysis of Trends and Policy Recommendations for a Peace Building Approach". In Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace, Bern, 2003. p. 42.

<sup>70</sup> UNHCR (2007: 170) estimates that in 2006 there were between two and three million of internally displaced persons in Colombia – the largest population of internally displaced in the Western Hemisphere and second largest in the world, second only to Sudan.

causes that together with the apparent inability of judiciary to bring responsible to justice further make the war escalate.

Very important factor is also meddling of foreign countries in the Colombian civil war. The most obvious is the role of USA with its political and material support to the Colombian government in the struggle against insurgents. The neighbouring countries, too, play an important role. After the Colombian incursion on the FARC-EP camp in Ecuador, the Colombian government claimed to have found data on the computer, of then second highest ranking FARC-EP officer Raul Reyes that proved collaboration of the Venezuelan government with the rebel group. Of course, such allegations were ferociously denied by the government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in a diplomatic dispute that followed. Although the Colombian government did present to the public some not very convincing data, which the Venezuelan government immediately marked as being forged, up to now nothing has happened in that regard. It is however a fact that, especially before the incident in Ecuador, Chávez often spoke high of the Colombian insurgent groups and even named a public library after Manuel Marulanda, a long-time chief of the FARC-EP, deceased in 2008.<sup>71</sup>

But, the most important among the proximate cause is without doubt drug trafficking into which all of the warring parties are involved directly or indirectly.

### *Drug trafficking*

Drug trafficking in Colombia first appeared in the mid-1960s when marijuana started to be grown massively.<sup>72</sup> In the 1980s, marijuana was replaced with a much more profitable production of cocaine.<sup>73</sup> At the beginning, coca was not massively grown for cocaine production in Colombia. Most of the coca paste was smuggled to Colombian cocaine laboratories from Bolivia and Peru and majority of cocaine exports then went out from Colombia. In 1991, Colombia produced

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<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, "Improving Security Policy in Colombia", *Latin America Briefing* No 23, 2010. Retrieved, from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/B23%20Improving%20Security%20Policy%20in%20Colombia.ashx>, July 21, 2010, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Mexico and Colombia were the main suppliers of marijuana for the North American markets. But, in the 1970s and 1980s, the government eradication campaigns and rise in domestic supply in North America drastically lowered marijuana production in both countries (Jelsma, 2003: 41).

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia", *Latin America Report No 11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx), p. 3.

only 13.7 % of the world coca leaf production with 80% of the world cocaine production. The government anti-drug campaigns in Bolivia and Peru, extensively supported by USA, contributed to the fact that Colombia today produces 80% of the world cocaine, majority of which is made from domestic coca leaves.<sup>74</sup> Heroin, too, is produced in Colombia.<sup>75</sup>

Drug trafficking led to the creation of large drug cartels among which Cali and Medellin stood out by its size and power. Cartels were large hierarchical organizations disrupted and destroyed by the police in the mid-1990s, what led to the creation of smaller, technologically and organizationally more sophisticated and less integrated cartels.<sup>76</sup> Cartels played an important role in the Colombian civil war. At the time of large cartels prior to the 1990s, their leaders, in collaboration with large landowners, formed illegal private paramilitary formations to protect them against the police and guerrilla attacks. It was already in the late 1980s when these formations had begun to emancipate themselves from their patrons and started to take over the lands where coca was being grown.<sup>77</sup> In this way, paramilitaries became financially independent from their former patrons. Drug trafficking also had large influence on the Colombian guerrillas, especially on the FARC-EP, which found a source of finance for their activities in levying taxes on drug producers, merchants and transporters, also seeking to impose certain order on the illegal business.<sup>78</sup>

However, the illegal armed groups are not the only one involved in drug trafficking. Ernesto Samper's presidential campaign, after which he won the

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<sup>74</sup> International Crisis Group, "War and Drugs in Colombia", *Latin America Report N°11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx), pp. 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dario E. Teicher, "The Colombian War and the Narco-Terrorist Threat". In: Michael W. Ritz Ralph G. Hensley, Jr. James C. Whitmire, (eds.), *Homeland Security Papers: Steaming the Tide of Terror*, Maxwell Air Force Base, USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2004, p. 25.

<sup>77</sup> International Crisis Group, Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace, *Latin America Report No 1*. 2002. Retrieved, from [http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublication/document\\_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en\\_/001\\_colombias\\_elusive\\_quest\\_for\\_peace.pdf](http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/27311/ipublication/document_singledocument/F12B8E97-AE9C-4F5F-8736-1101A37CC158/en_/001_colombias_elusive_quest_for_peace.pdf), July 20, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Although many sources, especially those of the Colombian and U.S. governments, label the Colombian guerrillas as pure criminal drug trafficking organizations that is not the case. The guerrillas do not use money gained in drug business for personal enrichment, but they rather spend all of it on financing their struggle, consolidation of power and infrastructural development in the areas they control (Vanessa Joan Gray, "The New Research on Civil Wars: Does It Help Us Understand the Colombian Conflict?", *Latin American Politics & Society*. 50 (3), 2008, pp. 67-8).

Mark W. Chernick, "Conflict in Colombia: An Analysis and Perspectives for Peace". In: Mo Bleeker Massard (ed.), *Colombia: Conflict Analysis and Options for Peace-Building*, Swisspeace. Bern, 2003, p. 13.

elections in 1994, was financed by millions of dollars from the Cali cartel.<sup>79</sup> In addition to that, President Samper was once again embarrassed on 20 August 1996, when drug-sniffing dogs found 8 pounds of cocaine on the official Colombian Air Force airplane that was to fly President Samper to New York to speak at the United Nations on the evils of drugs.<sup>80</sup> The indirect links between the Colombian government and drug trafficking were again revealed with the “para” scandal in 2006, when the evidence of collaboration between top government officials and illegal paramilitaries were brought to public.<sup>81</sup>

The Colombian government has been waging war on drugs for a long time, but with not much success. Although the UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported a 47% decrease of coca producing areas,<sup>82</sup> it in no way has reduced the retail prices in the streets of U.S., while the purity of cocaine has improved.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

In the last eight years, the Colombian forces achieved many successes in the war against the illegal armed groups. The paramilitary AUC was demobilized through negotiations and the largest two of the guerrilla groups, FARC-EP and ELN, were forced out of a large area of the territory they had previously controlled, while at the same time, they suffered great losses in personnel due to deaths in combat and desertions. For weakening of all non-state actors, the intensity of the Colombian civil war has been lowered, although the intensity of the government vs. FARC-EP conflict still remains at the level of crisis, while the intensity of the conflict with the paramilitaries and ELN is currently at the level of crisis. Both insurgent groups have successfully adapted to the situation on the battlefield by employing new tactics. Territorial control was mostly substituted by guerrilla warfare and unless they regain their strength, it will

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<sup>79</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia”, *Latin America Report No 11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx), p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Dario E. Teicher, “The Colombian War and the Narco-Terrorist Threat”. In: Michael W. Ritz Ralph G. Hensley, Jr. James C. Whitmire, (eds.). *Homeland Security Papers: Steaming the Tide of Terror*; Maxwell Air Force Base, USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2004, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> International Crisis Group, “Colombia's New Armed Groups”, *Latin America Report No 20*. 2007. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/20\\_colombia\\_s\\_new\\_armed\\_groups.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/20_colombia_s_new_armed_groups.ashx), p.5.

<sup>82</sup> Connie Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 2005. Retrieved July 22, 2010, from <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/48382.pdf>, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> International Crisis Group, “War and Drugs in Colombia”, *Latin America Report No 11*, 2005. Retrieved July 21, 2010, from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11\\_war\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_colombia.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/11_war_and_drugs_in_colombia.ashx), p. 2.

probably remain that way. Although weakened, the ELN and FARC-EP are far from being defeated. The new Colombian government is at a crossroad. It can further escalate the war against insurgents, while it seems that complete military victory is impossible, or it can engage insurgents in negotiations. It seems that now, more than ever, it is the time to do so. The fact is that root causes of the civil war are far from being resolved. Although the level of poverty has been lowered in the last two decades, it is still high both in the urban and rural areas. The income inequality has grown and is one of the highest in the world and the question of agrarian reform is even more burning than it was at the outbreak of the war. Opportunities for political participation are now much better than they were before, but majority of the population is still politically passive, most likely due to its low confidence in the political system riddled with corruption on all levels. The poor socio-economic and political development of Colombia is still a great source of legitimacy for the insurgents in the areas where they operate and will remain such unless the Colombian government initiates real efforts to address the root causes of the conflict.

The war on drugs has provided few tangible results, as the overall supply of drugs to European and North American markets has obviously not been disturbed. The fact is that all warring parties are involved in drug trafficking and when one is weakened the other takes over. Beside that, taxes on drug trafficking are only one of the many incomes the insurgents have, so disrupting drug trafficking will not necessarily cause downfall of insurgency. If overall military victory of the government against the insurgents is achieved and root causes of the conflict are not resolved, there are great chances that some other sort of violence will sprung out in Colombia, what could involve formation of either new insurgent groups or new criminal organized groups that will be more financially than politically motivated as was the case in El Salvador. Such violence will be much more difficult to deal with, as the visible, identifiable and more or less centrally organized enemy that operates today will be replaced by a large number of small and fragmented criminal organizations.

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## O GRAĐANSKOM RATU U KOLUMBIJI

### APSTRAKT

Namera je da se u članku da prikaz profila i uzroka konflikta u Kolubiji, da se baci svetlo na okvir u kome se sadašnji događaji na bojnim poljima u ovoj zemlji odvijaju, i na taj način skrene pažnja na činjenicu da se sukob ne može rešiti isključivo primenom brutalne vojne sile, što je sa uspesima koje su snage Uribeove vlade postigle u borbi protiv gerile, postalo generalno mišljenje. Cilj ovog članka je takođe da se postavi temelj koje može da posluži kao osnova za neku dalju kritičku analizu kolumbijskog oružanog konflikta.

*Ključne reči:* Kolumbija, paravojne formacije, gerilski način ratovanja, droga, kriminalne organizacije.