

# *Venezuela Slams EU's Criticism as Foreign Interference*

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Caracas, April 3 (RHC) -- The Venezuelan government on Wednesday strongly rejected recent criticism from European Union spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic as unfounded foreign interference in its domestic affairs.

A statement issued by the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry said the government "categorically rejects" the statements issued by Kocijancic, who serves as spokeswoman for Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Kocijancic's remarks about the situation in the country don't correspond with reality, the Venezuelan foreign ministry said.

"Our country is internationally known and respected as a land of peace, and a tireless defender of the human rights of its citizens," the ministry said.

"Freedom of expression, association and assembly are guaranteed by the Venezuelan National Constitution as inalienable civil rights and as such are respected, observed and upheld by the Venezuelan government led by President Nicolas Maduro," said the statement.

According to the ministry, since mid-February the EU "has issued a series of statements and resolutions that question with the utmost impertinence Venezuela's democratic institutions."

"The Venezuelan government demands the European Union respect our nation and its institutions," the statement said.

The Venezuelan government reiterated its desire to maintain and deepen ties with the EU and its member states, "but with full respect for the sovereignty and total adherence to the fundamental principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states."

A wave of violent anti-government actions organized since early February by European and US-backed hardline conservative opposition groups have left 39 people dead and more than 500 injured.

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