

MERCOSUR summit to address trade relations with China

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Convention center where the MERCOSUR summit takes place, Asuncion, Paraguay, 2022. | Photo: Twitter/ @NicSaldias

Asuncion, July 21 (RHC)-- The 60th Summit of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) began on Wednesday with meetings of ministers of foreign affairs and economy in Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, where the Summit of Presidents will be held on Thursday.

So far, Paraguay's Foreign Affairs Minister Julio Cesar Arriola has confirmed the participation of presidents Alberto Fernandez (Argentina), Luis Lacalle Pou (Uruguay), Luis Arce (Bolivia), and Irfaan Ali (Guyana).

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will not be present at this regional meeting, in which the Colombian Vice President Marta Lucia Ramirez and the Chilean Foreign Minister Antonia Urrejola will represent their

governments.

One of the most controversial points during this summit will be the treatment of Uruguay's interest in unilaterally negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with China. This proposal has generated antagonistic positions within the integration bloc.

"Joint progress must be made towards prioritizing the agenda for external negotiations, as stipulated in the MERCOSUR founding texts," Paraguayan Foreign Minister Arriola said.

"We believe that this gives the States greater strength and negotiating capacity. For us it is essential to respect the principle of consensus in decision-making," he added, reflecting the position of Paraguay, the only MERCOSUR country that does not have diplomatic relations with China but does maintain them with Taiwan.

Regarding the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski's request to speak before the MERCOSUR leaders, Arriola said that it is still in consultation with the member countries. "If there is no consensus, the virtual meeting with Zelensky will not take place," he said.

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