

The outlook for Lasso gets more complicated

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By Maria Josefina Arce

Things have gotten complicated for President Guillermo Lasso. In his election campaign he emphasized the fight against corruption in Ecuador, and now he finds himself in the crosshairs of accusations of illegal acts in public companies, based on a scheme allegedly led by his brother-in-law Danilo Carrera.

The scandal erupted due to revelations of the digital media La Posta, which revealed the existence of a criminal structure that would be linked to the president through his brother-in-law and would operate mainly in the National Electricity Corporation and the Electrical Corporation of Ecuador.

According to the investigation, Carrera, despite not holding any government position, manages public companies and is the one who decides which private firms work with the state, in exchange for bribes.

Lasso has therefore been summoned to appear before the Parliamentary Commission investigating the facts. Carrera, whom the press calls "The great godfather", was summoned to appear last Saturday, but did not attend. His lawyer in a letter pointed out that he had no link with the corruption scheme.

Although in a national chain last January the President distanced himself from his brother-in-law, days before he had defended him, describing him as an honorable and unimpeachable man. The tenant of the Carondelet Palace has rather lashed out against the press, which he accuses of attacking his government.

The scandal has brought to the memory of many the so-called Pandora Papers, a gigantic journalistic investigation that two years ago exposed a tax evasion network and linked several presidents, former presidents, politicians and multimillionaires.

Lasso's name appeared in the investigation. According to the revelations he maintained contact with 14 offshore companies, most of them based in Panama, and closed them after a law was passed in Ecuador in 2017 prohibiting presidential aspirants from having companies in tax havens.

The panorama is not at all favorable for the president, who together with the scandal of his brother-in-law has received a hard setback in the municipal elections and the popular consultation of the past fifth.

The NO won in the eight questions of the referendum, promoted by Lasso and which, in the opinion of the citizens, did not provide an answer to the serious problems affecting the South American nation, such as the high level of insecurity.

In addition, in the elections, the opposition Revolución Ciudadana, of former president Rafael Correa, obtained important victories, winning in Quito and Guayaquil, the two most important cities of the country, and also in other localities.

The reality is that Guillermo Lasso faces a difficult panorama. In a year and a half of mandate he has seen an accelerated decrease in the index of popular acceptance. His government faces great discontent and attrition.

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