

# *Mercosur Foreign Ministers to Meet Regarding Venezuela*

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Asuncion, July 9 (RHC)-- Paraguayan Foreign Minister Eladio Loizaga has confirmed that the foreign ministers of the member-states of the Mercosur trade bloc will meet this coming Monday to discuss the political situation of Venezuela.

The meeting was called by Horacio Cartes, the right-wing president of Paraguay, who is a member of the bloc. Mercosur currently counts on five full members: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Loizaga used diplomatic language when describing his country's intentions in holding the meeting, saying that the situation in Venezuela needed to be "seriously considered."

However the move by Cartes, a stalwart ally of the United State, is being widely seen as an effort to eventually see Venezuela suspended from Mercosur. The South American trade bloc has a mechanism known as the Ushuaia Protocol, that provides a road map for the suspension of a member country if there is a breakdown in democratic order.

The last country to be suspended was Paraguay after a parliamentary coup, orchestrated by the country's elites, ousted democratically elected president Fernando Lugo in 2012. All countries, except the one being discussed, must reach a consensus for a member to be suspended.

Mercosur was conceived as a means to promote free trade in South America but has also played an important role in strengthening regional political and cultural integration, especially with the election of progressive governments in the region in the past decade.

However, Mercosur has once again shifted rightward after a coup in Brazil saw President Dilma Rousseff was ousted and elections in Argentina saw the right-wing Mauricio Macri come to power. The coup government in Brazil is seeking to prevent Venezuela from assuming the presidency of Mercosur.

Macri threatened to invoke the Ushuaia Protocol against Venezuela shortly after winning the presidency in November 2015. Macri was eventually forced to back down from that threat after receiving scant support from other member countries.

Similar efforts by foes of the Venezuelan government of Nicolas Maduro to have Venezuela suspended from the Organization of American States have thus far failed.

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