

**EUROPEAN MASTER DEGREE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
DEMOCRATISATION**  
*INSTITUTE FOR PEACE RESEARCH AND SECURITY POLICY*  
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**UNDERSTANDING THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE POLARISATION IN  
VENEZUELA**

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**Searching Appropriate Methods to Build a Culture of Peace**

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*A Susanita, quien me dijo como llegar a Lido antes de dejar este mundo y la única que  
no pudo estar físicamente a mi lado.*

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## ABSTRACT

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Considering that nowadays Venezuela is undergoing through a face of transition due to the recent death of the President Hugo Chávez it poses a turn of the political process that started with his raised to the presidency in 1999. During the last 14 years Venezuela has been under a socialist regime, which as revolutionary got its basis on the struggle of classes having a polarisation effect on the population Venezuelans are divided in two groups: one defending the government and the other defending the opposition; it shows a strong confrontation that leads to verbal and physical violence between their members who are not able of holding a normal debate.

The polarisation issue is affecting the enjoyment of human rights and the peaceful living in the country. Based on rejection, intolerance and resentment, the rates of violence and discrimination from both sides have risen in time and are getting imprinted in the culture and the institutions; Venezuelan people are getting used to live in a hostile environment. Since governmental administrations have a major influence on people and should manage the public affairs, it is necessary to propose paths of change towards the strengthening of the culture of peace which can allow the restoration of the proper communication between both political groups which might positively impact the governance and enjoyment of human rights.

## INTRODUCTION

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### **Identification of the problem**

Currently Venezuela is undergoing through a transition phase after Hugo Chávez dead. His domination of political institutions and on the population in general is posing further challenges to the newly established government which despite following the same ideological line, has to face the consequences of 14 years of personal political domination of the leader which affected important elements in the democratic system and an opposition becoming more radical and defensive of its position especially due to the non recognition of the electoral results of 14 April 2013<sup>1</sup>.

The presidential election of Hugo Chávez successor left significant results that demonstrates that polarisation levels are critical at the moment as the constituencies are divided in half being an important reflection of the fragility of the political situation; furthermore is of paramount importance to heal the erosion in the rule of law, the democratic system and the good governance but the lack of dialogue difficult this process<sup>2</sup>.

### **Analysis of the problem**

In order to tackle the issue of the polarisation and the influence it has had on human rights, democracy and good governance it is necessary to understand its rooted causes.

Venezuela, as well as other countries in Latin America has a historical background of high levels of poverty, marginalisation, corruption and impunity<sup>3</sup>. In 1989 an important social turmoil erupted due to strong marginalisation that the most oppressed classes were suffering as a consequence of neglected administration of the wealth of oil revenues and the application of economical neoliberal policies that would affect the cost of basic products and services<sup>4</sup>. Later in 1992 Hugo Chávez organised two coups d'état against the government, this situation cleared the path for his emergence as a major

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<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 28, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 38, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Foundation Salvador Seguí. 'El Caracazo hace 24 años (The Caracazo 24 years ago)', at <http://lahistoriadeldia.wordpress.com/2013/02/28/el-caracazo-hace-24-anos-y-video/>, last time consulted on 23 April 2013.

political leader with an important influence over the population forming the division between *chavismo*<sup>5</sup> and opposition. The analysis of the dynamics between these two groups offers to a better understanding of the conflict which would lead to a possible solution through peace building and building cultures of peace.

### **Approach, Challenges and Limitations**

Through a theoretical approach, the analysis of the polarisation will be undertaken examining the theory of the large-group identity of Vamik Volkan applied to the existent literature about the recent history of Venezuela and to other academic investigations on the polarisation issue. This will be a challenging task due to the fact that the investigation will follow the course of a social – psychological analysis which is out of the area of expertise of the author of this thesis dissertation.

According Volkan, in order to define and explain the polarisation it is necessary to define seven threads to the large-group identity. For him, at a social-psychological level large-group identities are produced due to a shared mental phenomenon and the case of Venezuela will be analysed through the large-group regression<sup>6</sup>.

Polarisation between subgroups within a society is caused by mutual threat of the social identities of these groups<sup>7</sup>, in the case of Venezuela it will be considered two groups: the *chavismo* (or followers of former president Chávez believes) and the opposition. Each subgroup use general categories to demean the other: the *chavismo* consider the opposition as a rich, bourgeois and fascist group, supporter of the empire (US) and guilty for the poverty, therefore a statelessness group which is not a safeguard of the national interests and the Venezuelan people. The opposition qualifies the *chavismo* as a dictatorial, communist and authoritarian regime, power abusive with high rates of corruption.

Vamik Volkan defines large-group regression as a mechanism to avoid the sensation of anxiety that can be caused by any situation of danger<sup>8</sup>. In the case of large-groups the

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<sup>5</sup> Jaua Elías, Venezuela: the Real Meaning of ‘Chavismo’, at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/53292>, last time consulted on 09 May 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Dr. Alexander Redlich, Department of Psychology – Centre for Key Competencies, University of Hamburg, 10 April 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 56.

regression can be presented after having faced a massive trauma that involves important loss (lives, property, and prestige) or after suffering a humiliation caused by another group. The leader and its group maintain, protect, modify, or repair their shared group identity; hence the role of the leader is crucial and has the aim to reinforce the symptoms of followers in order to be in constant state of regression and the loose of the leader can cause a malignant regression entailing a process of chaos<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, and in order to find means to avoid an escalation of the conflict emerges the question on the importance of understanding the deep roots of the polarisation in order to find appropriated methods for building cultures of peace that would enhance the conflicting relation between *chavismo* and opposition in order to restore the dialogue.

Following Vamik Volkan conceptions, following a deep evaluation of conducts and interests among leaders due to the extreme importance of their personalities and defining the dynamics in large-group identities, are key elements to find a successful peace building method<sup>10</sup>.

The aim of this investigation will be limited to the understanding of the current polarisation in Venezuela analysing its roots since 1989 and its functioning until 2013; highlighting the importance of its deep analysis in order to find appropriate peace building methods without providing a deep definition of them due to its complexity which would require a separated investigation and deep expertise on social-psychology and peace studies.

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<sup>9</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 56-59.

<sup>10</sup> Höck and others, 2011, p. 34.



## CHAPTER 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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### 1.1 The origin of the social difference, unfair distribution of oil revenues and marginalization

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is considered to have one of the largest proven oil reserves worldwide calculated in 297.57 billion barrels<sup>11</sup> by 2010, besides other natural resources such as gas, gold and iron. The oil was nationalized in 1974 by national decree under the mandate of the former President Carlos Andrés Pérez<sup>12</sup>, since then the country started to fully enjoy oil revenues.

Nevertheless, at the beginning the enjoyment of the revenues was partial and only certain groups were obtaining profits from the oil benefits while most of the population was marginalized. In 1989 and during the second mandate of the former President Carlos Andrés Pérez the prices of oil dropped among OPEC members<sup>13</sup>, furthermore Venezuela had an inflation rate of 29, 5% since 1988, which forced the government to apply new economical policies based on a program called “*Paquete Nueva Venezuela*” (Package New Venezuela) based on a loan granted by the International Monetary Fund for 4.500 million dollars<sup>14</sup>. According to the requirements of the International Monetary Fund, the government was compelled to attain certain conditions which caused the application of neoliberal policies such as cutting all subsidies to the industry, privatizations, devaluations and liberalization of prices especially for combustibles<sup>15</sup>.

These policy changes caused a social clash known as “*El Caracazo*”; these spontaneous riots started on 27 February 1989 in Caracas and it extended to other 90 cities in the country, the situation lasted until March 5. It was a spontaneous and

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<sup>11</sup> Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Venezuela Facts and Figures, at [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/171.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/171.htm), last time consulted on 23 April 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Petróleos de Venezuela, from the privatization to the nationalization of the oil industry in Venezuela, at [http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenuhist.tpl.html&newsid\\_obj\\_id=104&newsid\\_temas=13](http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenuhist.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=104&newsid_temas=13), last time consulted on 23 April 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Brief History – The 1980’s, at [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/24.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/24.htm), last time consulted on 23 April 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Foundation Salvador Seguí. El Caracazo hace 24 años (The Caracazo 24 years ago), at <http://lahistoriadeldia.wordpress.com/2013/02/28/el-caracazo-hace-24-anos-y-video/>, last time consulted on 23 April 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

independent reaction against the implementation of the abovementioned neoliberal policies, since the people were already suffering due to the high cost of living and their incapacity to access basic goods in the market. This situation was present among the people in need who, until that moment, were marginalised and unseen. As result of these protests many citizens lost their lives or disappeared, and until this moment there have been no compensations for the victims. According to the figures given by medical services in the country, an estimated of 1,000 to 1,500 people lost their lives; and according to the police there were 287 victims. This was the first mass action with strong class overtones since 1935<sup>16</sup>.

All these social clashes and problems brought the attention towards the marginalized class in Venezuela, which for years remained under the shadows and emerged silently as a majority. Even though this situation is not linked to the organisation of the two attempted coups d'état (4 February and 27 November 1992) led by Hugo Chávez against the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez, it triggered and reinforced the following situation : the organisation of the coups was supported by the military force since they were deeply ashamed for reacting violently against the population according to the presidential order issued during the riots<sup>17</sup>; and the coups reinforced the social feelings raised during the *Caracazo*. The positive impact and acceptance among the population towards the military revolt gave Hugo Chávez the popularity and political strength to successfully run and win the Presidential elections in 1998<sup>18</sup>.

## **1.2 Social chaos and the birth of the leader, social movement initiated by Hugo Chávez**

While Venezuela was under a social chaos brought out by the economical crisis, Hugo Chávez started as a military officer to build up a movement among the military lines; some of its members are currently part of the government cabinet. This movement was based on socialist ideas learned by Hugo Chávez during his youth. Military officers supporting these revolutionary and socialist ideas founded a group called "*Ejército Bolivariano Revolucionario*" (Bolivarian Revolutionary Army) which later by the

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<sup>16</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.

adherence of civilians would become “*Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 MBR-200*” (Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200 MBR-200)<sup>19</sup>. This movement led to the future formation of the political party “*Movimiento Quinta República or MVR*” (Fifth Republic Movement), through which Chávez had an electoral front to win 1998 elections<sup>20</sup>.

Hugo Chávez won the elections on 1998 with a majority of 62, 46% (which represented 462.411 votes) with and electoral abstention of 33, 5% (which represented 395.225 voters out of a total of 1.179.136 formally registered constituencies)<sup>21</sup>. In comparison to historical participation in the elections, this was an overwhelming majority due to the inclusion of the people (*el pueblo*) in the political speech of Hugo Chávez which is a source of historical identity for the lowest social classes and people in need, this denomination is related to the historical achievements from the XIX century in which the people played an important role. This became the starting point for the construction of a social and political consciousness in the country and the rendering of the sense of self – esteem and hope among the population in need<sup>22</sup>. After this election the political participation enhanced and the percentage of abstention decreased in a considerable way towards the years.

In time, the Movement Fifth Republic along with other leftist parties that supported Chávez’ regime would reunite and formed altogether the “*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*” (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) which was officially founded on 14 March 2008<sup>23</sup>.

### **1.3 The election of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and the shift towards the ideology of the Bolivarian Revolution and the XXI Century Socialism**

Hugo Chávez started his government in 1998 with a central leftist speech in which he assured to promote a more likely social capitalism rather than socialism. In fact, he

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<sup>19</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> National Electoral Council (CNE), Elections 6 December 1998, at [http://www.cne.gov.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98\\_01.pdf](http://www.cne.gov.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98_01.pdf), last time consulted 02 July 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). Somos un Faro para América Latina y el Mundo (We are a headlamp for Latin America and the world), at: <http://www.psuv.org.ve/psuv/>, last time consulted 2 May 2013.

denied being socialist. In 1999 Chávez implemented an economical policy of austerity with a conservative approach in order to tackle the deficit due to the low oil prices in that period. Among the economic reforms it was the reduction of public expenditures, the establishment of taxes (IVA), bank fees and the elaboration of a public budget based on an oil price of nine dollars per barrel, and he kept the same government cabinet as the previous government. Furthermore, the Constitution of 2000 avails the right to private property. Therefore at the beginning, there were no open signs of an economic revolution according to the classical conception of socialism<sup>24</sup>.

After the referendum to revoke his mandate in 2005, Chávez radicalised his speech and political direction, openly stating the change to a socialist system during the closure of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil<sup>25</sup>. The Bolivarian Revolution started as a national democratic revolution<sup>26</sup> based on a participatory democracy or the 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism which emerges as a the revision of the 20<sup>th</sup> century socialism, but maintaining the Marxist concept of the struggle of classes and the fight against the imperialism, in this case represented mainly by the United States<sup>27</sup>.

Another relevant factor of the revolution is the use of the image of Simón Bolívar who was the liberator of many countries in America during the emancipation movement against the Kingdom of Spain in the XIX century. In Venezuela, Simón Bolívar has always been the main image of political movements representing the Latin American union and the social struggle. His thinking has always been adapted to all times and political aims<sup>28</sup>, therefore during the Bolivarian Revolution the Bolivarian ideology raised from a mix between the love that Simón Bolívar had for the region, the revolutionary ideas from Marx and Che Guevara, along with Jesus<sup>29</sup>.

Besides the Bolivarian spirit other factor of influence, and which is also the main factor for the maintenance of the revolution, are oil revenues. During Hugo Chávez regime oil barrels reached outstanding prices from USD 25, 80 in 2003, passing to USD

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<sup>24</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 57. / Woods, 2006, p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Woods, 2006, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> Carrera Damas, 2003, p. 322.

<sup>29</sup> Vid infra chapter 3.

55, 90<sup>30</sup> in 2006, to USD 100, 63 in 2013<sup>31</sup>. This economical advantage is the main fact due to which the government is able to sign different kind of agreements for social, economical and cultural exchange with different countries of the region, i.e. Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador, among others in a lower scale<sup>32</sup>. This allows the Bolivarian project to have a block that supports the Venezuelan Revolution on an international scale.

Due to the ideological change of the *chavismo*, it started in Venezuela a social clash in which parts in conflict are defending opposed ideologies and political views, which started the struggle between *chavismo* and opposition.

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<sup>30</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> OPEC, Basket Price, at [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/), last time consulted 02 July 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 217.

## CHAPTER 2. DEFINITION OF THE GROUPS

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### 2.1 The Bolivarian Revolution

President Hugo Chávez offered as a political project the “Bolivarian Revolution” which in essence is a promise to recover and renew Venezuela from the mistakes committed by previous governments in the recent past; the aim was to recover the country from its past, especially from the discredit of the traditional political parties, State corruption (in which it is included the private sector) and the exploitation of oil revenues for the benefit of a small group. This past caused a wide underdevelopment and inequality in a country very rich in natural resources<sup>33</sup>.

As well as the traditional revolutions, the Bolivarian one also claims the transformation of the social class structure; its particularity is that it is adapted to the Venezuelan political tradition of using discursive categorisations based on the nationalism from the independence battles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to this discursive strategy the Bolivarian revolution took the binary relation between “the people” and “the oligarchy”. Most of the population identify themselves as part of “the people” and only few identify themselves as part of “the oligarchy”. This discursive strategy lead Hugo Chávez to win the elections, regardless of the fact that he was elected by an assorted group composed by people of different social economic strata. The discursive strategy of the revolution constantly refers to the terms “people” and “oligarchy” to highlight the differences between social classes which strengthened the traditional Marxist approach of the movement<sup>34</sup>.

### 2.2 The *Chavismo – El Pueblo* “The People”

The term was imposed by the opposition in its intend to fight against the Bolivarian Revolution, the word is implemented in a pejorative way to denominate the followers of the revolution; since then, the term has been used by the followers of the movement in

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<sup>33</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, pp.3-4.

a different way<sup>35</sup>. According to Elías Jaua, current Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela since January 2013:

*“After consolidating the peoples’ victories of 2002, 2003 and 2004, we once again ratified our identity as chavistas. I remember that during that period Chávez began to question the term, because he believed that it gave room to a personalistic tendency that was against the revolutionary principles. But he later realised that being chavista was something that transcended his surname.*

*Being chavista means feeling a connection of love towards a political leader who hasn’t betrayed us, it means recognising ourselves as people who are the descendants of a historical hero (Bolívar) who belongs to us and who has become the present and the future”<sup>36</sup>.*

### **2.2.1 The importance of Hugo Chávez personality**

Hugo Chávez personality and eloquence made him one of the most outstanding leaders of the past years. He revived the concept of revolution towards Latin America becoming a reference of political, economical and social leadership. Even though this is a combination of media and communications, Hugo Chávez histrionic personality is an essential key in the influence he had and which led him to become a global icon<sup>37</sup>.

Founded on leftist ideas that were introduced to him at a young age, combined with a charismatic character and an irreverent and non diplomatic way of making politics, his facility to cause different reactions in people, either for good or bad: from causing enthusiasm that could evolve to fanatic admiration or love; to cause rejection that could evolve to intolerance and hate; plus the use of a natural and colloquial language was one of the ways Hugo Chávez was able to establish an open communication and understanding with the people, facilitating his connection with the masses especially through the use of cultural idiosyncrasy. Also, his explosive and extrovert personality

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<sup>35</sup> Jaua Elías, Venezuela: the Real Meaning of ‘Chavismo’, at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/53292>, last time consulted on 09 May 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 19.

was a key factor in his popularity and a tool for the growth of the political movement that he started building since he was a young officer from the military force<sup>38</sup>.

The impact of his declarations and speeches facilitated the course of the political processes and the self reflection of the people that felt they were represented by his manners, led the movement to be not only leftist, revolutionary and socialist, but also to become *chavista* especially after his dead on March 05<sup>th</sup> 2013.

### **2.3 The Opposition – *La Oligarquía* “The Oligarchy”**

Mainly comprised by the people that reject Hugo Chávez’ movement, this group is represented by a coalition of parties opposed to the current regime. It is to believe that it is formed by the middle and high class groups, owners of lands and companies. It is the bourgeoisie or oligarchic group.

After the oil strike Hugo Chávez started to apply stronger and more radical policies which caused a higher division among the population, this division favoured the growth of the opposition<sup>39</sup> due to the political change towards a socialist economical system. The implementation of the socialist system strengthened the central State which started to apply policies on expropriations and nationalizations of private companies and lands; the amount of people among the opposition group increased, since in view of the radicalisation of the central government many functionaries decided to move away from the *chavismo* and joining the opposition<sup>40</sup>.

Different considerable errors were made by the opposition during the Bolivarian process, such as resigning to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2005. Their return to the National Assembly in 2010, gave them the chance to have a more influent participation in politics. The opposition had to analyse itself while coexisting inside of a particular democracy which is not offering all basic rights and warranties granted by a normal democratic system. In addition, the situation of the democracy in the country pictures an abnormal political and institutional scenario which complicates the existence of an efficient opposition<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Oppliger, 2010, pp. 27-32.

<sup>39</sup> Ponniah and Eastwook, 2011, pp. 67-97.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 20.



Despite of having a harsh start, the time has led this group to have a stronger leadership, nowadays represented by the Democratic Unit Roundtable (*Mesa de la Unidad*), which is a coalition of all the opposition parties with different tendencies<sup>42</sup> confronting the strength of the Socialist United Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

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<sup>42</sup> Organisation *Unidad Venezuela* (Unity Venezuela), *¿Qué es Unidad Venezuela?* (What is Unity Venezuela?), at <http://www.unidadvenezuela.org/acerca-de/>, last time consulted on 10 May 13.

## CHAPTER 3. THE POLARISATION ISSUE

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### 3.1 Definition of polarisation

According to the social psychology the polarisation is the radical positioning of individuals or groups which create a conflict and people find themselves completely opposed to the other group. Both parties involved in the conflict are mutually in-group, denying the legitimacy or the existence of the other; in this kind of situations normally the parties are highly emotional hence the conflict reaches a personal level<sup>43</sup>.

The polarisation implies simplification, reunion of common thinking, beliefs and social identification in order to determine the “us” and the “others”, quoting Galtung:

*“At the individual level polarisation means cognitive simplification, eliminating ambiguities, clearing the ground for black – white, foe – friend cognitions, with corresponding emotions and volitions, willing harm to Other and bliss to Self, simply because through polarisation Self and Other are well constructed. At the collective level, polarisation means organizational simplification, defining the camps, defining the cause”*<sup>44</sup>.

Following this idea, the minds of people are collectively prepared and connected through common thinking, emotions and will, therefore are organized for action<sup>45</sup>. The situation in Venezuela started by a social polarisation, meaning two social classes confronted with one another due to their historical backgrounds. The confrontation was exalted not only by the historical economical differences but also due to the political system established in the country since 1998<sup>46</sup> which made the situation evolve towards

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<sup>43</sup> Mireles Manuel Alejandro, *Polarización Política en Venezuela: Análisis desde la Perspectiva de Cultura de Paz* (Political Polarisation in Venezuela: Analysis from the Peace Building Perspective), at <http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/993/1/RAA-20-Mireles-Polarizaci%C3%B3n%20social%20y%20pol%C3%ADtica%20en%20Venezuela.pdf>, last time consulted on 23 May 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Galtung, 1996, p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 91.

a political polarisation which worsened after President Hugo Chávez died last 5 March 2013<sup>47</sup>.

The intolerance, the disapproval and the rejection towards the other exacerbates the climate of prejudice undermining the peaceful coexistence and breaking the possibilities for dialogue<sup>48</sup>.

According to the Venezuelan professor Mireya Lozada:

*“Aspects risking the strengthening of democracy started appearing due to the loss of respect and the acceptance of the differences between both groups, namely, when the intolerance is sewed in the social canvas to rupture it. According to her, polarisation can be defined as:*

- *The strengthening of the stereotyped perception: us/them*
- *Highly emotional (acceptance or rejection without middle ground)*
- *Personal involvement (any issue affects the person)*
- *Loss of common sense (rigid and intolerant positions replace the discussion, the dialogue or the debate)*
- *Families, schools, churches or any other social spaces of coexistence are obliged to take part in one side or the other.*
- *The confrontation increases the solidarity and cohesion in each group.*
- *The mutual perception is unfavourable, interactions are hostiles or inexistent and the conflict is latent”<sup>49</sup>.*

In this situation we face two large-groups identities that are in mutual confrontation, each large-group gathers each other according to their common characteristics<sup>50</sup>, in the case of Venezuela according to their political point of view.

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<sup>47</sup> Infante Alfredo, *Venezuela: la polarización social ya no se expresa en polarización política* (Venezuela: the social polarisation is not longer expressed in the political polarisation), at <http://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/venezuela-la-polarizacion-social-ya-no-se-expresa-en-la-polarizacion-politica/>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Mireles Manuel Alejandro, *Polarización Política en Venezuela: Análisis desde la Perspectiva de Cultura de Paz* (Political Polarisation in Venezuela: Analysis from the Peace Building Perspective), at <http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/993/1/RAA-20-Mireles-Polarizaci%C3%B3n%20social%20y%20pol%C3%ADtica%20en%20Venezuela.pdf>, last time consulted on 23 May 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 93.

<sup>50</sup> Höck et al., 2011, p. 36.

Even though the polarisation issue got visualized during Chávez government, and got strengthened after his dead, in reality the causes of the issue have a deep historical background of violations and lack of institutional cohesion and justice<sup>51</sup>.

According to Galtung, polarisation means to bring a conflict to the most simplistic level, there are two parties and each one forms a camp which gathers all conflicts together forming a super-theme. Each camp has positive and negative cooperation, out of which, positive cooperation is used within the group and the negative is used between them. The main issue with the polarisation is that it can potentially lead to an escalation of the conflict, even though is not a common characteristic. Therefore, there is the need to find ways to restore the dialogue and prevent such escalation<sup>52</sup>.

The polarisation leads to a strong large-group identity, concept brought by Vamik Volkan<sup>53</sup>. For him, at a social – psychological level large group identities are produced due to a shared mental phenomenon, which can be analysed through three different areas: large-group regression, large-group externalization / progression and large-group mourning<sup>54</sup>. In the present case, the investigation will be focused on the large – group regression.

Furthermore, Vamik Volkan has identified seven threads that compose the large-group identity:

1. *Shared, tangible reservoirs for images associated with positive emotion*
2. *Shared “good” identifications*
3. *Absorption of others’ “bad” qualities*
4. *Absorption of (revolutionary or transforming) leader’s internal worlds*
5. *Chosen glories*
6. *Chosen traumas*
7. *Formation of symbols that develop their own autonomy*<sup>55</sup>.

Volkan remarks that the last four threads are characteristic in the process of development and maintenance of the large-group identity<sup>56</sup>. According to this idea and

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<sup>51</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> Galtung, 1996, pp. 90-91.

<sup>53</sup> Höck et al, 2011, p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> Volkan, 2004, p. 37.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

considering the case of Venezuela, it is possible to identify connections with the last four threads as follows:

- ***Absorption of (revolutionary or transforming) leader's internal worlds:***

This thread is interlinked with the personality of a “transforming” or “charismatic” leader capable to bring together hundreds or millions of people into a new kind of political participation which can turn to be adaptive or destructive, but in order to follow its leader image the large-group must be in state of regression which will be further analysed<sup>57</sup>. According to Volkan:

*“Transforming or charismatic leaders reflect the group’s sentiments in the opinions that they express, their public appearances, the speeches that they deliver, their avowed likes and dislikes, and even the way that they dress. Combined with externalizing and projecting aspects of their personal psychologies, these elements influence followers; create new political ideologies; inflame or tame religious, national, or ethnic sentiments; and sometimes create “new” or modified suitable reservoirs for externalization”*<sup>58</sup>.

During Chávez’ regime it was possible to observe how the political transformation led to a social and cultural change. The use of new terms in the language, music, flags<sup>59</sup> and other symbolic elements including the clothes: jackets and hats with the Venezuelan flag, the red beret and red or blue shirts among others<sup>60</sup>. The line or type of speech used by each respective leader marked the lines through which each group (in the *chavismo* or the opposition) reflects and identifies each other, or among them and their leaders<sup>61</sup>.

Taking into consideration the explosive personality of Hugo Chávez and his modest origin, both elements were a projection of himself on the population and therefore the people felt reflected and represented by him<sup>62</sup>. This association was constantly

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<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, pp. 45-46.

<sup>58</sup> Volkan, 2004, p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 92.

<sup>60</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Lozada, 2008, pp. 93-94.

<sup>62</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, pp. 207-211.

reinforced due to the natural communication Chávez had with the population through the use of colloquial language and history tales, therefore his political rallies were conversations out of which he would implement policies.

The *chavismo* demarked its area of influence in the western part of Caracas city since that is the area where the major number of people from the lower strata lives<sup>63</sup>, while the concentration of the opposition group was mostly represented by the wealthy population in the south-eastern part of the city<sup>64</sup>. This division shows how each group took part of their identity: the west became a representation of *chavismo*, while the opposition sector is identified with eastern areas<sup>65</sup>.

In 1998 during the presidential elections Hugo Chávez emerged as the most powerful leader among other two candidates<sup>66</sup>. The centre piece of his campaign was the organization of a constitutional assembly to draft a new constitution intended to mark a change from the Punto Fijo<sup>67</sup> era, aiming to renew the Venezuelan political system. Chávez' proposal of renewing Venezuelan politics and constitution, his background as the military leader of a rebellion to overthrow the mandate of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992 (considered to be the responsible of social exclusion in the past), combined with his personality, gave his political campaign the appropriate combination to appeal to the popular masses who were calling out for a radical change<sup>68</sup>. For Ellner and Hellinger:

*“In many aspects, the ascendance of Chávez [...] fit a broader pattern of a personalistic political leadership in Latin America's neoliberal era. In*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Infante Alfredo, *Venezuela: la polarización social ya no se expresa en la polarización política*. (Venezuela: the social polarisation is not longer expressed in the political polarisation), at <http://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/venezuela-la-polarizacion-social-ya-no-se-expresa-en-la-polarizacion-politica/>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Despite this division west – east is related to the social polarisation, it is necessary to remark that there are large amounts of poor population in the entire city regardless of their geographical orientation, therefore this division is merely symbolic.

<sup>66</sup> During Presidential election in 1998 Chávez confronted two major candidates, Irene Sáez former mayor of one of the main wealthy municipalities of Caracas (Chacao) whose good administration provided her with potential support as to run in the presidential elections, and Henrique Salas Römer who was twice governor of one of the main states in Venezuela (Carabobo). Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 66.

<sup>67</sup> Puntofijismo or Punto Fijo era is the denomination given to the period in which the traditional parties (mainly represented by AD –Acción Democrática– and COPEI –Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente–) ruled Venezuela and it is a period comprised of at least two decades. These political parties came to power after the overthrow of the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958. It is necessary to highlight that the Communist party was excluded from this pact. Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 29. / The Crisis Group, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 66.

*countries like Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina, where traditional parties were either very fragile or weakened by economic crisis, personalist leaders with a populist style emerged, typically bypassing or subordinating political parties in order to cultivate a direct relationship with the masses (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1996; Torre, 2000). [...] Chávez played off public discontent with the status quo, portraying himself as a man of the people who had risen up to challenge the political establishment. In contrast with these other leaders [...] Chávez rejected neoliberalism and gave new political expression to the class antagonism that had been present since the end of the 1980's"*<sup>69</sup>.

According to Volkan's approach, the absorption of the leader's internal worlds in the Venezuelan case can be observed in the evolution from Bolivarian Revolution to *chavismo* (which has been considered among Chávez followers as a new ideology). The acceptance of the movement as an ideology strengthened among the population after Hugo Chávez died<sup>70</sup>. Before dying, Chávez had the ability to influence the people with religious, national and ethnic sentiments (in this case ethnic is understood as a synonym of social class), those sentiments were inflamed and summoned to form the *chavismo* as a political movement which is still in process of solidification and unification:

*"I remember one of the first marches where I saw a woman from the people holding a poster with the message "I am chavista, so what?". It was then, when we became chavistas, which at the beginning only meant we are Hugo Chávez followers and defenders. And as Bolivarians and chavistas we conquered the victories against the coup d'état, the fascists strikes of 2002, the guarimbas<sup>71</sup> of 2003 and we ratified our president in 2004. [...] In this way the chavismo was born from the Bolivarianism, which is deeply*

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<sup>69</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 67.

<sup>70</sup> Venezuelan News Agency, *Stella Lugo: el chavismo ha nacido como una nueva corriente político-ideológica* (Stella Lugo: chavismo has borned as a new school of thought), at <http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/stella-lugo-chavismo-ha-nacido-como-una-nueva-corriente-pol%C3%ADtica-ideol%C3%B3gica>, last time consulted on 27 June 13.

<sup>71</sup> *Guarimbas* is the name given in Venezuela to a form of protest which consists in the blockade of streets.

*Christian and later became socialist, because there is no other way to profess the deepest human values”<sup>72</sup>.*

Religious beliefs and historical facts were often utilised. Hugo Chávez believed that Jesus Christ<sup>73</sup> and Simón Bolívar<sup>74</sup> were socialists<sup>75</sup>; after his death the appearance of images or the presence of Hugo Chávez through certain symbols such as a bird, were used during the political campaign of current President Nicolás Maduro<sup>76</sup>; a chapel was also built to pray for Chavez’ health and later to mourn his death, it has also been promoted the use of rosaries and crucifixes with the image of Hugo Chávez<sup>77</sup>.

- ***The threads of chosen glories and chosen traumas***

Regarding the fifth and sixth threads on chosen traumas and chosen glories, Volkan explains that leaders usually refer to past glories of their people in order to plant a feeling of pride and identification among the followers. Reference to historical events of triumph and the mythology surrounding those events, or the historical personalities that

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<sup>72</sup> Jauas Elia, *El chavismo*, at [www.telesurtv.net/articulos/2012/12/30/el-chavismo-3040.html](http://www.telesurtv.net/articulos/2012/12/30/el-chavismo-3040.html), consulted on 27 June 2013.

<sup>73</sup> “I make a call for discussion among the communities, in the grassroots, was Christ capitalist? Supporting the bourgeoisie? Supporting the empire? When and where? The only Christ that came to the Earth is with us and supporting the humbles, the poor and calling the rich to consciousness, to peace. That is one of the axes of our Bolivarian movement”. El Universal, Chávez reiterates the “socialist” character of Jesus Christ, at <http://www.eluniversal.com/2011/04/17/Chávez-reitera-caracter-socialista-de-jesucristo.shtml>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Simón Bolívar is considered the liberator of America. He was the main commander of the battle of independence in South America against the Spanish kingdom during the liberation process in the XIX century. He pursued the liberation of most of the countries in the area previously represented by provinces; it comprehends the current territories of: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela.

<sup>75</sup> “In reality, every day that passes I am more convinced that the evolution of the Bolivarian thinking was leading to socialism. If he (Bolívar) had lived some more decades, I am completely sure that he would had become socialist, as his master Simón Rodríguez was”. Chávez, 2011, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> During a public TV appearance current President Nicolás Maduro declared that Chávez appeared to him in the form of a bird blessing him for the political campaign for the presidency that took place last month of April. This declaration had a strong impact especially in social media which strongly criticized his comment. Finally the bird became a symbol of the campaign. The New York Times, Even in Death, Chávez is a Powerful Presence, at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/09/world/americas/even-in-death-Chávez-dominates-venezuelas-presidential-race.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/09/world/americas/even-in-death-Chávez-dominates-venezuelas-presidential-race.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Several references can be found in internet in this regard. The selling of rosaries with Hugo Chávez face in different websites, news about the daily amount of visitors to his tomb and altars built in his honour are among the main religious references. García y Lozano, El Rosario de Hugo Chávez (Hugo Chávez rosary), at <http://www.elmundo.es/américa/2013/03/18/venezuela/1363625426.html>, last time consulted 27 June 2013.



participated in them, are ways for the leader to recreate scenarios to identify himself with the people<sup>78</sup>.

Venezuelan politicians are characterised by the use of historical references and historical heroes; the myth surrounding Simón Bolívar and the cult to his personality or the romantic history built around him during the independence process are common references for politicians.

The cult to the Bolivarian personality was historically built on romantic ideas, which according to the Venezuelan historian Germán Carrera Damas, was forged to hide the unsuccessful results of the independence process on building a Latin American union according to the project of Simón Bolívar<sup>79</sup>. Bolivarian history is commonly adapted to political interests. As mentioned before Hugo Chávez considered Simón Bolívar to be socialist, therefore the chosen glory was the Bolivarian thinking and the aim was to use it as an anti – imperialist and anti – capitalist movement.

For Volkan, in times of revolt or tension leading to war-like situations, leaders recall chosen glories in order to reinforce the identity of groups<sup>80</sup>. Even though in the Venezuelan case tensions and revolts have not reached the level to be considered a situation leading to a civil war, the use of the chosen glories helped building a political movement on common historical grounds able to break the previous order and undergo through an ideological and political change towards socialism which clearly caused a general division in the population.

With regards to the chosen trauma it plays an important role, stimulating the feeling of humiliation and injury suffered by a large-group, turning on the collective mental representation of an incident that caused losses and victimized the group, a chosen trauma also remains unconscious in the collective memory and in times of stress or menace the chosen trauma can become as palpable as it had happened yesterday<sup>81</sup>. In the case of Venezuela the winning of the elections by the opposition implies a regression to the previous status quo during the Punto Fijo era, which would lead the population again to misery and marginalization. The government constantly recalls the

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<sup>78</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 47- 48.

<sup>79</sup> Carrera Damas, 2002, pp. 42-43.

<sup>80</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 47.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 48-50.

traumatic experience of the spontaneous social turmoil that occurred during the *Caracazo*<sup>82</sup> in 1989. The below description can serve as picture to understand the social and political impact this event had:

*“The reaction to the economic reform package was immediate and spontaneous. At first people from the country’s poor neighbourhoods, the barrios, protested and blockaded streets. As the anger of the population increased, riots and large-scale looting broke out. Even though the protests and riots died down after two days, Carlos Andrés Pérez imposed a curfew and ordered the police and the military force to repress anyone disobeying the curfew and ordered to disperse. State security forces ended up killing barrio inhabitants indiscriminately, even firing into homes at random. Many believed that the repression was an act of retaliation, an effort to permanently squash any resistance against the president. In the end hundreds, maybe even thousands of people were killed, many in their homes, and many were later found in mass graves”<sup>83</sup>.*

The high levels of violence on the days of spontaneous riots and the disproportional reaction of the governmental authorities effected the sensitivity of the population, and the trauma lived is still imprinted in the minds of Venezuelan people and a change of the current political power is considered to be a regression to the same social situation that caused it, therefore one of the main slogans of the Bolivarian movement is “*no volverán*” “they will never return<sup>84</sup>”.

- ***The thread of Symbols***

*“The seventh thread of the identity of a group is the symbol that functions to tie together some or all of the other threads. Though such a symbol may*

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<sup>82</sup> *Caracazo* is the name given to a spontaneous social turmoil occurred during the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1988 since such demonstration started in Caracas. The riots were a social reaction to the application of economical policies with neoliberal orientation due to a loan requested to the International Monetary Fund, such neoliberal policies implied the raise on the price of services and would directly affect an already widely marginalised population. During the demonstration people pursued looting aiming to find food and products for basic needs. Guerrero Alejandro for Panorama (Minute 5:50), El Caracazo, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzLvacdAN30>, last time consulted on 27 June 2013.

<sup>83</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 38 Violence and Politics in Venezuela, 2011, p. 10.

*originally stand for any one of the six threads already described, it eventually develops its own autonomy as a component of the large-group tent”*<sup>85</sup>.

For the Bolivarian movement, and despite its name, the main symbol can be found in the red coloured t-shirts and berets which are used by the members of the Bolivarian circles. The red colour prevails as the main label of *chavismo* as a leftist movement: red t-shirts, red jackets, red berets, red stars and the denomination “red very red ones” (“*rojos rojitos*”)<sup>86</sup> are among the main symbolic elements of the Bolivarian revolution. The use of these elements caused the total rejection of the opposition movement towards the colour red, which immediately is associated with *chavismo*; opposition groups reject red elements even if they are not related to the political movement. In the counter-part the opposition is symbolized with the colours blue, black and white, and white hands are used as a symbol of resistance by the student movement.

### **3.1.1 The fear to the past as political tool, the large group regression**

Taking into consideration the psychological definition of regression, which is a response to anxiety as a state of alert caused by the fear to a dangerous situation, the regression refers to a turn back into a state of alert and defence, or to a behaviour that comforts us in response to a stressful incentive or trauma that activates our alert or anxiety<sup>87</sup>.

Vamik Volkan defines large-group regression as a mechanism to avoid the sensation of anxiety that can be caused by any situation of danger<sup>88</sup>. In the case of large-groups the regression can be presented after having faced a massive trauma that involves important loss (lives, property, prestige) or after suffering a humiliation caused by another group. The leader and its group maintain, protect, modify, or repair their shared group identity, hence the role of the leader is crucial and has the aim to reinforce the symptoms of followers in order to be in a constant state of regression or to make attempts to progression; the state of regression is not only negative, it can lead to

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<sup>85</sup> Volkan, 2004, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> Oppliger, 2010, p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 56-58.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, p. 56.

creative processes through the progression, the loss of the leader can cause a malignant regression entailing a process of chaos<sup>89</sup>.

In his description Volkan described the typical signs and symptoms of large-group regression under central authority focusing in observable shared processes after a traumatizing event<sup>90</sup>.

In the case of Venezuela one of the constantly referred traumatizing events was the *Caracazo*<sup>91</sup> which so far marked a trauma in the contemporary history of Venezuela and uncovered hidden resentment and marginalisation, this violent social outbreak left several damages and victims with no identification of the responsible, fair trials nor compensations for damages and losses until nowadays. Volkan listed 20 signs and symptoms of regression but as he mentioned, not all of them must be present in the society in question<sup>92</sup>. Therefore for the purposes of this investigation, only the ones that might be applicable to the Venezuelan case will be analysed in order to understand the deep causes of the polarisation:

1) *Group members lose their individuality: following the studies of Freud, followers become a group of “equals” around the image of the leader image*<sup>93</sup>.

At the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution the main slogan was “*Venezuela ahora es de todos*” (now Venezuela belongs to all), which denoted that with the Bolivarian revolution a beneficial and appropriate administration would start, focusing on inclusion and the appropriate distribution of wealth for all the people<sup>94</sup>, in time and due to the central role of Chávez in the political situation and through the different electoral campaigns the type of messages surrounding the image of Chávez evolved to a stronger love relation between the leader and the people. The slogan changed to “*Chávez Corazón de mi patria*<sup>95</sup>”, (Chávez heart of my motherland), “*Chávez somos todos*” (we

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<sup>89</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 56-59.

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>91</sup> Vid supra, chapter 1 and 2.

<sup>92</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 60-62.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, p. 62.

<sup>94</sup> In the past, the Venezuelan oil wealth benefited a few. Today, it benefits a few millions, at [http://www.embavenez-us.org/HCO1\\_Chavezad\\_4CFINAL.pdf](http://www.embavenez-us.org/HCO1_Chavezad_4CFINAL.pdf), last time consulted on 27 June 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Political campaign *Chávez Corazón de mi Patria*, at <http://www.psuv.org.ve/audios/Chavez-corazon-mi-patria/>, last time consulted 27 June 2013.

are all Chávez) or “*juntos somos Chávez*” (together we are Chávez). With regards to the last mentioned slogan, this was used for the political campaign after his dead, in view of the absence of the leader there was the need to maintain the unity in the *chavismo* for the presidential elections that took place on 14 April 2013, underlining the request made by Chávez for the people to vote for Nicolás Maduro and to remain united in order to maintain the revolutionary project<sup>96</sup>.

2) *The group rallies blindly around the leader:*

*“In this case members experience exaggerated dependence on the leadership and threats to basic trust. [...] Totalitarian objects block the individual’s normal development but paradoxically they also bring some sense of safety [...] causing people to achieve a feeling of false importance and wholeness”<sup>97</sup>.*

While Hugo Chávez was in the presidency people felt that he was able to personally solve their issues; during public rallies and in general people made direct requests to the president for houses, food, jobs and the satisfaction of other basic needs. All advances achieved during his government were identified to his person. The direct communication people had with Chávez made them feel empowered and represented and any decision the president made in different areas were made in the name of the people. The figure of Hugo Chávez represented a really important element of the Bolivarian movement, supporters used to feel completely represented by him and after his dead it is possible to observe that the image of unity falls apart and internal conflicts inside the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) started to emerge. During the mourning process the people massively felt the absence and the pain for the loss<sup>98</sup>. In

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<sup>96</sup> Chávez Hugo (speech), *Chávez somos millones, tu también eres Chávez* (We are millions of Chávez, you are also Chávez), at <http://blog.Chávez.org.ve/temas/discursos/Chávez-somos-millones-tu-tambien-eres-Chávez/#.Ucyaotj3FAA>, last time consulted 27 June 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Volkan, 2004, p. 63.

<sup>98</sup> Delgado José, *Los chavistas Lloran a Chávez* (chavistas cry for Chávez), at <http://www.elnuevodia.com/blog-loschavistaslloranaChávez-1464008.html>, last time consulted 30 June 2013.

this case, for one group the leader represented their salvation and for the other the salvation was only possible with his disappearance<sup>99</sup>.

- 3) *The people are divided into “good” segments –those who obediently follow the leader – and “bad” segments –those perceived to oppose the leader. Which can be combined with the third characteristic: the group creates a sharp “us” and “them” division between itself and “enemy”.*

According to Volkan, “*the followers of the political leader separate themselves from those who are not followers of the leader*<sup>100</sup>”. In this case both groups clearly differentiate each other and symbolic recognition plays a significant role: in Venezuela it is possible to identify the political position of someone due to the type of clothes, place of residence, language or other symbolic characteristic. This differentiation was particularly strong when the polarisation was mainly social, meaning that at the beginning of the revolution the confrontations were between a group representing the lower strata and a group representing the middle and upper classes. So the polarisation was between two social classes. Nowadays the social polarisation evolved to political polarisation, meaning that the confrontation of two social classes is not longer represented in the conflict rather than a confrontation between one group defending its leader and his project and the other completely rejecting the mentioned leader and his project. Both groups are mutually exclusive and are composed by people from different social classes<sup>101</sup>.

- 4) *Group members experiences increase magical thinking and reality-blurring*

Magical thinking and reality-blurring is understood as the development of certain myths that work as a tool or weapon for the defence of the large group identity<sup>102</sup>, below some situations and myths developed along the Venezuelan process will be described.

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<sup>99</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 90.

<sup>100</sup> Volkan, 2004, p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Infante Alfredo, *Venezuela: la polarización social ya no se expresa en polarización política* (Venezuela: the social polarisation is not longer expressed in the political polarisation), at <http://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/venezuela-la-polarizacion-social-ya-no-se-expresa-en-la-polarizacion-politica/>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Volkan, 2004, pp. 69-70.

Among the Venezuelan population it is possible to identify the use of different myths, and their creation was influenced by the political anxiety experienced; it could also be considered as media manipulation in order to pursue political aims. One of the most present ones was the constant fear for a possible invasion from the United States to Venezuela, for which it would be necessary to arm the civil population to have the capacity to respond to the so-called invasion, aiming to defend the revolution<sup>103</sup> and follow the training process to be prepared for a possible “asymmetric war”. Another example is the investigations that the government pursued to analyse subliminal messages of the political campaign of the opposition presumably hidden in advertisements belonging to the private sector<sup>104</sup>. Another example of the transmission of fears to a destabilisation process was the analysis of the doodle from Google dedicated to Venezuela during the independence day last 5 July 2013, which according to governmental media was designed to transmit the message for a coup d’état against the government<sup>105</sup>.

In recent time, one of the magic thinking that had more resonance in the national and international media was the declarations from current president Nicolás Maduro who during the political campaign for the presidential elections declared that Chávez appeared to him in the shape of a bird to bless his political campaign<sup>106</sup>. The image of a bird representing Chávez and his human image were constantly used during political rallies.

On the opposition side, in the early past it was always spread the feeling of the opposition being a majority able to win the elections, therefore for every lost election

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<sup>103</sup> Ministry of the Popular Power for the Defence, Functions of the Bolivarian Milicias, at [http://www.milicia.mil.ve/sitio/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=61](http://www.milicia.mil.ve/sitio/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=61), last time consulted 27 June 2013.

<sup>104</sup> *Difunde la Verdad, Calzados Sifrina se cuela en la campaña* (Sifrina shoes got filtered in the campaign), at <http://www.difundelaverdad.org.ve/opinion/calzados-sifrina-se-cuela-en-la-campana/#.UcykNj3FAA>, last time consulted 27 June 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Rojas Rafael, *Google vuelve a conspirar contra Venezuela* (Google is conspiring once more against Venezuela), at <http://www.difundelaverdad.org.ve/opinion/google-vuelva-a-conspirar-contra-venezuela/#.Ud6kZaz3FAA>, last time consulted on 11 July 2013.

<sup>106</sup> Rojas Ingrid, *Latin American Rulers Have a Thing for Birds*, at [http://abcnews.go.com/ABC\\_Univision/News/latin-american-rulers-love-birds-castro-Chavez-maduro/story?id=18942220#.UcS2Zdi3Rko](http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/latin-american-rulers-love-birds-castro-Chavez-maduro/story?id=18942220#.UcS2Zdi3Rko), last time consulted on 14 June 2013.

immediately the reaction was to consider the results as a fraud<sup>107</sup>; observing the electoral results of previous years the abstention played an important role in the electoral process. The abstention was due to the incapacity of the opposition to mobilised the electorate for an alternative political project; in 1998 two of the major candidates from the opposition obtained 2.797.729 votes and in the 2000 elections obtained 2.530.805 votes, which showed that between these elections Chávez raised 84.088 votes while votes for the opposition decreased by 266.924<sup>108</sup>. This can be considered as one reason why the opposition was not able to win the elections rather than the hypothesis that frauds were constantly planned.

### **3.2 Characterization of the polarisation in Venezuela**

As mentioned before, since 1998 during the first mandate of president Chávez he presented a political agenda guided by democracy and social capitalist ideas and he explicitly denied he would pursue expropriations and other economical changes towards a socialist system<sup>109</sup>.

In 2001 president Hugo Chávez carried out the implementation of new legislation to change economic and social policies or a “third way”<sup>110</sup>. This caused a generalized environment of discontentment among a fraction of the population leaded by representatives of the opposition (in that time headed by the chamber of industries). The opposition believed that the government was being influenced by Cuban leaders and whether this information was true or false was one of the factors that influenced the failed coup d'état that overthrown president Chávez from the power for 48 hours<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> Currently and according to the international opinion, the last presidential elections on April 2013 are the only ones that officially have been recognized as a possible fraud due to the inconsistent numbers in the results and other vicious processes according to international observers. Tormen Veronica, Una mission europea: el proceso electoral de Venezuela estuvo ‘viciado de nulidad’, at <http://www.elmundo.es/america/2013/06/18/venezuela/1371566537.html>, last time consulted on 27 June 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Valenzuela Pablo, Caida y resurgimiento, la evolución de la oposición política en Venezuela durante el gobierno de Hugo Chávez (fall and resurgence, the evolution of the political opposition in Venezuela during Hugo Chávez government), at [http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida\\_y\\_resurgimiento\\_La\\_evolucion\\_de\\_la\\_oposicion\\_politica\\_en\\_Venezuela\\_durante\\_el\\_gobierno\\_de\\_Hugo\\_Chavez](http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida_y_resurgimiento_La_evolucion_de_la_oposicion_politica_en_Venezuela_durante_el_gobierno_de_Hugo_Chavez), last time consulted 27 June 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, pp. 86-87.

<sup>110</sup> Ibidem, p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, pp. 41-56.



Social turmoil continued toward the year and on 2 December 2002 the opposition organised an oil strike that changed to a generalised strike started including the industry and formal commerce sectors and it ended in February 2002<sup>112</sup>; all these social demonstrations made the government to be more defence and offensive towards the opposition. Authorities and governmental officers were less open and almost intolerant to any kind of criticism<sup>113</sup>. Even though the polarisation increased in 2002, the opposition was not completely unified nor organized by then; their opinions, political rallies and critics started to be stronger and continuous but not homogenous<sup>114</sup>.

After the people approved President of Hugo Chávez to continue in his duties through public referendum in 2006, the government proclaimed that the Bolivarian project would follow a socialist line. This official declaration of the political ideology of the government was the point that completely brought out the polarisation issue, since supporters would completely follow this line of thinking and the opposition would completely reject it<sup>115</sup>.

Stronger and more confronted speeches were progressively increasing. The use of terms to characterize and differentiate one group and the other started to be part of the political and daily language, pejorative terms and strongly ideologically charged speeches started to be fully applied during the last 14 years in the country<sup>116</sup>.

The inequality, social exclusion, lack of institutional reliability, the progressive lost of the good reputation of the traditional political parties and the oil dependence are the historical causes that in the latest past increased the polarisation. Recently other factors have strengthened the polarisation, such as the confronted economical and developmental models defended by each group (capitalism vs. socialism), and the violence included in the speech of both groups (at individual level between politicians and civilians, public and private media in real or virtual spaces)<sup>117</sup>.

According to Ellner and Hellinger, social polarisation in Venezuela acquired its expression in approximately five fronts:

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<sup>112</sup> The Carter Centre, 2005,3-4.

<sup>113</sup> House of Commons of Canada, June 2012, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 136.

<sup>115</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 137.

<sup>116</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>117</sup> Lozada, 2008, 91.

1. *The growth of the informal economy and the aggravation of social inequality.*
2. *Mutual resentment between lower classes and relatively privileged sectors of the population.*
3. *The emergence of parties that appealed disproportionately to lower classes, thus breaking with the nation's tradition of multiclass parties.*
4. *Political leaders such as Hugo Chávez whose discourse and certain extent actions favoured the poor at the expense of privilege groups. The style and rhetoric of these same leaders appealed to the lower classes, and at the same time alienated the middle class.*
5. *Strong preferences of both lower and middle-class voters for certain presidential candidates (in contrast to previous electoral contests), and for certain policies”<sup>118</sup>.*

Each group takes its part and each group feels menaced by the other. In one hand the governmental groups are afraid of losing power, while the people supporting them are afraid of a set-back to the old political parties and return to the same status quo the country had in previous regimes; recalled by their social injustice and for being extreme right wing governments which will be to the detriment of interests of the people. For the opposition the loss of political and civil freedoms and the shift in the economical system are the main concerns, besides restrictions to the freedom of expression and conflicts in the parliament<sup>119</sup>.

### **3.2.1 The use of the polarisation as a political tool: “*divide et impera*”.**

Summoning all this characterizations it is also possible to analyse how the polarisation is a political tool with electoral purposes, an according to Javier Corrales it

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<sup>118</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 21.

<sup>119</sup> One of the main issues that caused a high controversy in Venezuela was the decision of the President of the Parliament Diosdado Cabello to withdraw the right to speak as well as their salaries to opposition parliamentarians until they recognized the presidential victory of Nicolás Maduro. In protest against the measure the affected group organized a boycott to one of the sessions of the Parliament which finished in a fight between both groups calling the attention of the international community and mass media. The Guardian, Rolling fistfight erupts in Venezuela parliament over disputed election, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/01/brawl-erupts-venezuelan-parliament>, last time consulted on 21 June 2013.

is also an artefact for state design<sup>120</sup>. Following his idea, polarisation can be considered as the confrontation of two political leading forces, ideologically opposed which by nature will try to bring force to their own side, and the political dialogue becomes a verbal fight in which the violent and insulting language<sup>121</sup> takes the lead and dialogue turns into discussions leading in some cases to physical fights<sup>122</sup>.

Recalling the idea that social polarisation evolved to political polarisation<sup>123</sup>; it is possible to consider that the polarisation was a political choice instead of a force pushed by social change and it was manipulated by the actors in conflict in order to favour their respective groups. Following Javier Corrales idea, polarisation often generates majorities in favour of political leaders<sup>124</sup>.

Strategically the central government concentrated the power and radically change the social system in 2002; causing a negative reaction from the previous dominant elites, which strengthened their oppositionist sentiment resigning to positions in the public administration which served as an opportunity for the Bolivarian movement to clear its cabinets. Gradually national institutions witnessed the reduction of their personnel since government staff that disagreed with the radical changes being implemented, cleared the path for the government to deplete the governmental portfolio and built a new one composed by supporters and followers of the Bolivarian movement, while people leaving their lines joined the opposition group<sup>125</sup>. Hence:

*“Defections have a huge feeding effect on polarisation: they change the balance of forces between the incumbent and the opposition. First, defections allow the opposition to obtain new allies and, more important, new reasons for hope: they feel that they have a good chance to unseat state-holders, and they feel vindicated. This is one more reason that the opposition felt so galvanized in 2001-2004. Second, defections may make*

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<sup>120</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, pp. 68-69.

<sup>121</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, p. 69.

<sup>122</sup> Vid supra, foot note 58.

<sup>123</sup> Infante Alfredo, *Venezuela: la polarización social ya no se expresa en polarización política* (Venezuela: the social polarisation is not longer expressed in the political polarisation), at <http://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/venezuela-la-polarizacion-social-ya-no-se-expresa-en-la-polarizacion-politica/>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, pp. 69-70.

<sup>125</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 72.

*the incumbent feel increasingly insecure (as a result of its political shrinkage) and, more important, further inclined towards radicalisation (because moderates are leaving and the power holder's inner circle becomes more homogeneous and radical-dominated). In short extremism from each side becomes mutually reinforcing<sup>126</sup>”.*

In sum, the implementation of radical policies helped the government to clear its path towards the implementation of the socialist system in the country and the construction of a new cabinet due to the resignation of several functionaries that joined the opposition, helping the government to fortify its power domination. Those radical changes gave each player a specific position in the political game. The balance of power was moved in order to manipulate the electoral results: more radical changes towards socialism would receive the complete support of the leftists and the rejection of the right wing supporters, while in the middle, non-radical groups fluctuated among the left and right wing or abstaining, helping the waving of the balance of power in favour of one side or the other, which was expressed in the several electoral contends that have taken place in Venezuela since 1998<sup>127</sup>.

The opposition contributed to the development of the polarisation due to its initial inability to concentrate in a solid political project, plus the fact that both parts are defending their respective political projects and the opposition was mainly focused in opposing and bringing down Chávez himself<sup>128</sup>. During the period from 2001 to 2004 the opposition sought through different activities (generalised strikes and strong protests which included a failed coup in 2001) the

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<sup>126</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p 76.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, 2011, pp. 78-81.

<sup>128</sup> Valenzuela Pablo, *Caida y Resurgimiento: la evolución de la oposición política en Venezuela durante el gobierno de Hugo Chávez* (Fall and resurgence: the evolution of the Venezuelan political opposition during Hugo Chávez government), at [http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida\\_y\\_resurgimiento\\_La\\_evolucion\\_de\\_la\\_oposicion\\_politica\\_en\\_Venezuela\\_durante\\_el\\_gobierno\\_de\\_Hugo\\_Chavez](http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida_y_resurgimiento_La_evolucion_de_la_oposicion_politica_en_Venezuela_durante_el_gobierno_de_Hugo_Chavez), last time consulted 28 June 2013.

overthrown of Hugo Chávez from the power which helped the radical division<sup>129</sup> between *chavistas* and “*escuálidos*”<sup>130</sup>.

### 3.3 The Consequences of polarisation

#### 3.3.1 Polarisation and its Consequences for Democracy

Even though officially the country seems to be under a democratic regime, different situations have proven that there are fragilities in the democratic system of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The term fragile democracy refers to countries which are ruled under a democratic system but the roots of it are not strong enough and factors of risk, such as social or political turmoil, can easily cause the collapse of the system. Therefore, the lack of strong democratic bases causes uncertainty, hampering the stability of the country. According to Damarys Canache, there are two types of fragile democracies: the first one is referred to new established democracies and the second one that applies to the Venezuelan case, which refers to democracies that have been weakened due to persistent economical and political instability hence are always suffering setbacks during the process of democratization<sup>131</sup>.

It is necessary to highlight that Venezuela although it has been an example of democracy in the Latin American continent, presented different failures due to long years of social and economical turmoil as mentioned before: the social clash in 1989 called “*Caracazo*” and two failed coup d’état<sup>132</sup> organized by Hugo Chávez against the former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, are some examples of the historical fragility of Venezuelan democracy. Furthermore, having accepted as president of the republic a retired military officer who tried to overthrow a democratically elected government shows the lack of trust people have on civilian regimes<sup>133</sup>. The establishment of the Bolivarian revolution brought several political changes in the public structure of the

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<sup>129</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 38 Violence and Politics in Venezuela, 2011, p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> The term *escuálido* given by Hugo Chávez to denominate the opposition group, it is a Venezuelan idiom that stands for puny. Ibidem supra.

<sup>131</sup> Canache, 2002, pp. 6-7.

<sup>132</sup> 4 February and 27 November 1992.

<sup>133</sup> Canache, 2002, p. 9.

government: the redaction of a new constitution which concentrated more power around the executive branch, the increase of the Presidential term from five to six years, the establishment of presidential consecutive re-election; and the change of the legislative power from bi-cameral to unicameral, among other significant changes provided the opportunity for the central government to widely concentrate the power<sup>134</sup>.

The polarisation can be considered as a fact affecting the proper functioning of the State's institutions; since each actor in conflict has to take a definite side, national institutions are representing one of the two political positions and therefore rejecting the opposite one<sup>135</sup>. The climate of uncertainty and lack of trust among the unrepresented part of the population might lead to a worsening of the polarisation, to violence (thanks to the impunity) or to apathy<sup>136</sup>. The civic trust is proportional to the level of use and compromise that citizens have in democratic institutions; the civic trust is harmed when citizens have to bribe functionaries in order to access any public service<sup>137</sup>. Furthermore, polarisation affected the spaces for civil participation in politics since each part in the conflict (not only at an institutional level) has taken a defined position which automatically implies the rejection of the other. Schools, churches and cultural spaces are demarked, shortening the spaces for free and normal coexistence of the population<sup>138</sup>.

It is a complex task to analyse the political and social evolution of the last 14 years of Venezuelan history. From one side, it is considered that the current government has been highly successful in implementing social policies<sup>139</sup> and strengthening the inclusion, and from the other side restrictions to freedoms are among the main problems. The situation is marked by two complete opposite visions constantly clashing each other: one vision related to the implementation of socialism, from which some indicators state that Venezuela has shown improvements in economic, cultural and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibidem, pp. 10-13.

<sup>135</sup> Lozada, 2008, pp. 96-97.

<sup>136</sup> Mireles Manuel Alejandro, *Polarización Social y Política en Venezuela: análisis desde la perspectiva de la cultura de paz* (Social and Political Polarisation in Venezuela: analysis from the peacebuilding perspective), at <http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/993/1/RAA-20-Mireles-Polarizaci%C3%B3n%20social%20y%20pol%C3%ADtica%20en%20Venezuela.pdf>, last time consulted 28 May 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Mihr, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 90.

<sup>139</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 90.

social rights, thanks to the constitutional reform and different social policies implemented by the central government which improved the healthcare, housing and education systems, increased the inclusion, strengthened the political participation improving the standards of life of the most vulnerable social sectors<sup>140</sup>. The other vision with a tendency to a capitalist system, at the beginning was represented by the trade union FEDECAMARAS<sup>141</sup> but in time it evolved to a coalition of parties with different tendencies represented by the “*Mesa de la Unidad Democratica – MUD*” (Democratic Unity Roundtable) which stands for the vindication of political, civil, and economic freedoms with social consciousness<sup>142</sup>.

In order to structure the analysis of the negative influence of the polarisation in the democratic system, is necessary to first take into consideration the main elements of democracy which according to the UN General Assembly resolution on the consolidation of democracy are<sup>143</sup>:

- Separation and balance of powers
- Civil participation
- Inclusion
- Independence of the judiciary
- Plural system of political parties and organisations
- Rule of law
- Accountability and transparency
- Freedom of media
- Respect for political and other rights

According to this resolution, the first analysis will be focused on the division of the national public powers in Venezuela, which are five according to the constitution: the executive, legislative, judicial, moral and electoral. For the purposes of this section the

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<sup>140</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 87.

<sup>141</sup> Valenzuela Pablo, *Caída y Resurgimiento: la evolución de la oposición política en Venezuela durante el gobierno de Hugo Chávez* (Fall and re-emergence: the evolution of the political opposition in Venezuela during Hugo Chávez government), at [http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida\\_y\\_resurgimiento\\_La\\_evolucion\\_de\\_la\\_oposicion\\_politica\\_en\\_Venezuela\\_durante\\_el\\_gobierno\\_de\\_Hugo\\_Chavez](http://academia.edu/1528723/Caida_y_resurgimiento_La_evolucion_de_la_oposicion_politica_en_Venezuela_durante_el_gobierno_de_Hugo_Chavez), last time consulted 28 June 2013.

<sup>142</sup> *Unidad Venezuela, ¿Qué es unidad Venezuela?*(What Unity Venezuela is?), at <http://www.unidadvenezuela.org/acerca-de/>, last time consulted 28 June 2013.

<sup>143</sup> A/RES/59/201 [on the report of the Third Committee (A/59/503/Add.2)], 23 March 2005, p. 5. This resolutions was not adopted by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela along with other 15 nations.

analysis will be focused mainly in the executive, legislative, and electoral powers while judicial power will be analysed in the next section and moral power will not be analysed due to the length of the investigation.

1. *The Executive Power*: previously exercised under the figure of former President Hugo Chávez, nowadays represented in the figure of President Nicolás Maduro, who resulted elected on 14 April 2013. The conditions under which the last elections took place and its results are still controversial and are under contestation before the Supreme Court of Justice. At the moment of writing this investigation the Supreme Court had not still emitted a sentence. This election also proved the level of the polarisation in the country, the final result was almost equal for both candidates resulting winner Nicolás Maduro with a really small margin of difference<sup>144</sup> of 236.000 votes, less than 1,6 points<sup>145</sup>.

As mentioned before, former president Hugo Chávez started a rebellion against previous status quo in Venezuela which took him to the presidency. The different measures taken by the executive increased their concentration of power; this generated a status of strong polarisation which at the same time would assure the power maintenance. Hugo Chávez had a strong power of command and a charismatic personality which favoured the concentration of power around him through the different elections<sup>146</sup>. Other factors, such as the opposition decision to withdraw from the parliamentary elections of December 2005<sup>147</sup> leaving the assembly without representatives from opposed sectors to the government during the period from 2006 to 2010 allowed this organ to enact the enabling law in several occasions which allowed the president to implement legislations by decree. Until 2010 the president counted with an uniform parliament through which it was possible to fully carried out the changes needed for the Bolivarian project; the enabling laws were approved with no real discussion in the National Assembly<sup>148</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> BBC News, Venezuela election: Maduro victory margin narrows, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-22353241>, last time consulted on 28 June 2013.

<sup>145</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 28 Venezuela: A House Divided, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, p. 160.

<sup>147</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 136.

<sup>148</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 71.



This concentration of power around the executive has hampered Venezuelan democracy, due to the authoritarian way in which laws and judicial decisions were directly influenced by Chávez. Currently under the regime of Maduro, the national assembly regained some more independence but it is still dominated by *chavismo*.

2. *The Legislative Power*: composed by parliamentarians in the National Assembly, it is currently chaired by Diosdado Cabello<sup>149</sup>.

The National Assembly was the main instrument used by President Hugo Chávez to undertake the development of the Bolivarian Revolution. The Bolivarian regime was highly favoured by the opposition decision to withdraw from the parliamentary elections alleging mistrust in the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral – CNE*)<sup>150</sup> clearing the path for the Bolivarian parliamentarians to have an almost uniform parliament.

The absence of a meaningful quantity of opposition parliamentarians in the National Assembly lasted for five years, therefore the government counted with two-thirds majority. This majority was used to push the power to the limits and legal interpretations were done for the advantage and political interest of the revolution, which was highly negative and placed Venezuelan democracy in a questionable position<sup>151</sup>.

Opposition parliamentarians occupied again safe seats in the national assembly in the year 2010 not implying that it was an easy task. The return of the opposition representatives to the parliament had been a physical prove of the polarisation level in Venezuela, as parliamentary discussions constantly lead to fights and the language used in the sessions is mainly dominated by a constant aggressive tone.

After the presidential elections on April 2013, due to the reluctance of the opposition's parliamentarians to recognise the electoral results that designated

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<sup>149</sup> Diosdado Cabello is another former military man who accompanied Hugo Chávez during his military career and also participated in the coups d'état against Carlos Andrés Pérez.

<sup>150</sup> OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 54, 30 December 2009, paras. 32.

<sup>151</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 13.

Nicolás Maduro as president, the president of the parliament Diosdado Cabello indicated that unless the opposition's parliamentarians recognised Maduro as the president they would not be given their right to speak in National Assembly's sessions<sup>152</sup>. In view of this measure, the opposition parliamentarians decided to boycott one of the sessions in the national assembly presenting a poster showing the message "coup to the parliament" due to the withdrawing of their rights as members elected and making noise during discussion; *chavismo* parliamentarians confronted them and the situation ended up in an uncontrolled fight<sup>153</sup>. The revolt called the attention from the international community which requested the government for intervention and mediation, to which the government requested the non-intervention in the internal affairs of the country<sup>154</sup>.

After this clash, sessions in the parliament were temporarily suspended and recently restarted on a normal basis with a full restitution of rights for the opposition representatives.

3. *The Electoral Power*: is represented by the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral – CNE*), which is an independent organ in charge of the administration of electoral processes. Despite its formal definition, it exist a generalized mistrust of the opposition towards this power and the decisions taken by it<sup>155</sup>.

The strong prominence of the CNE before, during and after the electoral processes affects the image of the neutrality that institutions should have. Furthermore, the structure of the organ is composed by 5 presidents or rectors

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<sup>152</sup> Cadena de radios, Niegan la palabra a los diputados que no reconozcan el triunfo de Maduro, at [http://www.cadenaderadios.com.ar/nuevo/vernota.asp?id\\_noticia=59772](http://www.cadenaderadios.com.ar/nuevo/vernota.asp?id_noticia=59772), last time consulted 28 June 2013.

<sup>153</sup> The Guardian, Rolling fist fight erupts in Venezuela parliament over disputed election, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/01/brawl-erupts-venezuelan-parliament>, last time consulted 28 June 2013.

<sup>154</sup> Garcia Jacobo and Lozano D., Maduro: 'Cuidado Espana, sabemos como defendernos', at <http://www.elmundo.es/america/2013/04/15/venezuela/1366014544.html>, last time consulted 28 June 2013.

<sup>155</sup> It is necessary to highlight that for the Venezuelan government the electoral system in the country is one of the most reliable "in the world". OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 54, 30 December 2009, paras. 32-33.

who are elected by 10 parliamentarians of the national assembly and 10 from other governmental areas, and due to the fact that 2/3 of the national assembly are formed by pro-government parliamentarians, the selection process is not the most recommended one<sup>156</sup>.

International electoral observers have been invited to witness the electoral process in Venezuela; irregularities have been found but not as significant to officially prove the corruption inside this institution and in fact the electronic electoral system in Venezuelan has been qualified as one of the safest<sup>157</sup>. Nevertheless, recently international observers expressed their concern on the presidential elections that took place last 14 April 2013, confirming that irregularities were increasingly stronger. This situation gave the opportunity for the opposition to formally request a revision of the electoral results before the Supreme Court of Justice<sup>158</sup>.

With regards to the other elements of democracy is possible to conclude that:

*The separation and balance of powers* is questionable in Venezuela, the executive power during Hugo Chávez regime was remarkably more controlling over the other public powers<sup>159</sup> but now the balance has changed due to his absence, letting the fissures of the *chavismo* to be more visible for the public: the unity of the military and civilian alliance of *chavismo* was held by Chávez; now there are two visible factions: the pro-Cuban left defended by the Maduro and the business oriented pragmatist defended by Diosdado Cabello<sup>160</sup>. Despite of this situation, there is still a strong in – group demarcation which shortens the space for opposition participation.

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<sup>156</sup> Institute for European Studies, Electoral Observation Mission for the Presidential Elections in Venezuela, p. 4, at [http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe\\_Final\\_Observacion\\_Electoral\\_Venezuela\\_14\\_abril\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe_Final_Observacion_Electoral_Venezuela_14_abril_2013.pdf) last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>157</sup> The Carter Centre, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>158</sup> Institute for European Studies, Electoral Observation Mission for the Presidential Elections in Venezuela, p. 4, at [http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe\\_Final\\_Observacion\\_Electoral\\_Venezuela\\_14\\_abril\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe_Final_Observacion_Electoral_Venezuela_14_abril_2013.pdf), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>159</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 28 Venezuela: A House Divided, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 28 Venezuela: A House Divided, 2013, p. 11.

*Spaces for civil participation* have been hampered due to the generalised violence that characterises the political debate, inclusion tends to be only in – group and there is marginalisation due to the demarcation of group spaces<sup>161</sup>.

In the general picture, the *independence of the judicial system* is critically observed since different judicial decisions followed Hugo Chávez requests rather than a deep judicial analysis such as the decision of Venezuela of withdrawing from the Inter – American Court of Human Rights<sup>162</sup>. Also, the selection process of judges has been highly questioned by the international community<sup>163</sup>. Issues regarding this public power will be tackled further.

Regarding the *existence of a plural system of political parties and organisations* the polarisation has not strongly affected this element, even though the central power is concentrated in an unique party: after the initial party *Movimiento V República* (Fifth Republic Movement or MVR) in 2007 the government decided to make a coalition among all the parties supporting *chavismo*, forming the major governmental party *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela or PSUV). With regards to the opposition coalition, it is composed by the traditional parties plus a selection of recently founded parties that have different lines of thinking, therefore is ideologically diverse but is dominated by two major parties: *Primero Justicia* (Justice First) and *Un Nuevo Tiempo* (A New Era)<sup>164</sup>.

Undeveloped elements of democracy<sup>165</sup> from the aforementioned list will be mentioned in the sections below when analysing how polarisation has affected human rights and good governance.

### **3.3.2 The Polarisation and its Consequences for Human Rights**

In order to tackle the analysis inherent to the subject of this section the focus will remain in the first and second generation of human rights, i.e. civil and political and

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<sup>161</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 91.

<sup>162</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Tightening the Grip, Concentration and Abuse of Power in Chávez's Venezuela*, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>164</sup> International Crisis Group, *Report No. 28 Venezuela a House Divided*, 2013, p.4.

<sup>165</sup> Accountability and transparency, freedom of media, respect for political and other rights.

social, cultural and economic rights. It is necessary to remark that the analysis focuses on the polarisation phenomenon; hence it is intended to be a political analysis.

Highlighting that despite the existence of a tense political situation in the country, the Venezuelan government achieved different improvements in human rights, which had been internationally recognized<sup>166</sup>. Some of the improvements accomplished since 1998 are: the formal protection of human rights by law in the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution<sup>167</sup>. At the moment of drafting this instrument there was a wide and open political discussion, and thanks to the ample spectre of protection it contains, the people feels represented and protected by the document. During the promotion of the new constitution the civil participation enhanced, Venezuelan people started enjoying the effective inclusion in the political discussion and it was possible to see that most of the population (even nowadays) always have access and make extensive reference to the Constitution<sup>168</sup>.

The implementation of social missions was an important and remarkable advance: in the area of civil and political rights, the Identity Mission (“*Mision Identidad*”) through which a wide number of the population received an identification document, ensuring their inclusion and their civic rights and duties, strengthening their electoral rights and participation<sup>169</sup>.

With regard to the social, economic and cultural rights, the main goal was the eradication of poverty which the government tackled through the implementation of social missions on health, education and housing, plus the assurance of the right to food. The social policies implemented have had a great impact through the Venezuelan population which stood at 0.3898 in the Gini coefficient in 2010<sup>170</sup>.

But despite different improvements, the polarisation has been affecting the appropriate implementation and enjoyment of rights for all. The social inclusion of the population in need brought the exclusion of the other part of the population becoming a

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<sup>166</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/12/L.10, 11 October, para. 9.

<sup>167</sup> Included in the Title III of the Constitution on “Duties, human rights and guarantees”, encloses 10 chapters regarding the protection and legal recognition of the universality and indivisibility of human rights from civil and political rights to social, cultural, economic, to indigenous people and environmental rights. A/HRC/WG.6/12/VEN/1, 19 July 2011, paras. 11, 12.

<sup>168</sup> House of Commons of Canada, June 2012, p. 4.

<sup>169</sup> House of Commons of Canada, June 2012, p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> AC/HRC/WG.6/12/VEN/1, 19 July 2011, paras. 24.

dictatorship of the majority, even considering that the kind of government implemented in Venezuela is democratic (taking into consideration the effective voting process), the issue is that basing the implementation of politics on referendum can become a tyranny of the majority which dominates the elections and leaves the minority out of the system<sup>171</sup>. The influence of the polarisation can be seen in the violation of the following civil and political rights:

- ***Right to Political participation:***

Opposition representatives have seen their right to participate in politics constrained in several occasions. The government manages to put obstacles to their political participation during the elections and if they result elected, posterior limitations are applied hampering their mandate as elected representatives<sup>172</sup>.

One example was the case of the former major Leopoldo López, who was disabled from holding public office through an administrative decision which prevented him from participating in the 2008 regional elections and banned him until 2014<sup>173</sup> on the basis that he mishandled public funds<sup>174</sup>. Leopoldo López presented his case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights which emitted the following decision addressed to the Venezuelan government:

*“On this case the court found that: “i) his right to defence was violated, because no specific accusation was made; ii) “[...]false assumption of facts for assuming that the declaration of annulment was a simulated action”; iii) “false assumption of law and violation of the presumption of innocence [...] for assuming [...] the objective liability”; iv) “false assumption of law for assuming that the authorization to spend contained in the budget law of the Municipality of Chacao [...]was a committed or incurred credit line”; v) “[...]false assumption of law for assuming that in the budget modification [...] there had been any use of appropriations for purposes other than those intended,” and vi) “violation of the principle of exhaustion of the*

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<sup>171</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> Ibidem, pp. 14-15.

<sup>173</sup> López Mendoza v. Venezuela (ICHR, 2011).

<sup>174</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 14.

*administrative decisions.” Furthermore, by requesting a precautionary measure for the protection of a constitutional right they “required that “the Comptroller not apply [Article 105 of the LOCGRSNCF] during the annulment lawsuit””<sup>175</sup>.*

In view of this decision the government of Venezuela partially restored Leopoldo López his right to political participation being able to run for public office but preventing him to administrate public funds, this decision made Leopoldo López to stay out of the direct political participation<sup>176</sup>.

Upon the argument that the *amicus curiae* that participated in the analysis of the case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights was presided by a relative of Leopoldo López, the Venezuelan government considered that the decision of the Court was partial; also the Venezuelan Court of Justice considered in its decision that the political rights are not absolute and they can be limited in favour of the general interest. The government argued that to run for public office the process implies an administrative career, running for popular elections and the free designation, and in the case López the limitation would apply only if the actor in conflict was interested in participating in public elections. The Venezuelan Supreme Court of Justice decided that the sentence made by the Inter -American Court of Human Rights was unplayable since the sanction against Leopoldo López was administrative and not politic<sup>177</sup>.

In view of this situation, the government applied all available means in their power to prevent Leopoldo López to have a full political participation. This decision was based in the need of the government to cut the spaces for the contrary group to participate in politics; evaluations on corruption are not equally applied to members of the Bolivarian movement having a double standard in the application of the law. The right to equality before the law and to a fair trial are not fully applied and the judicial system is criminalizing the opposition disrespecting their right to dissent and to political participation<sup>178</sup>.

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<sup>175</sup> López Mendoza v. Venezuela (ICHR, 2011).

<sup>176</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> File No. 11-1130 (TSJ, 2011).

<sup>178</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 15.

So far the government of Venezuela has applied the administrative decision to ban 400 people<sup>179</sup> which after a revision was reduced to 272<sup>180</sup> people disqualified from running for public offices, the lists<sup>181</sup> made by the central government directly menaced the right to political participation among opposition representatives<sup>182</sup>.

- ***Freedom of expression, assembly or association and freedom of Media***

Restrictions on the freedom of expression are not only characteristic of the Venezuelan government under Hugo Chávez regime, it was also restricted during previous governments but currently self – censorship due to the fear of retaliation is widely present among the national media<sup>183</sup>.

The first strong reaction against media was against the television channel *Radio Caracas Television (RCTV)* which was one of the oldest TV channels in the country with a wide national broadcast that reached most of the territory. The retaliation against the TV channel started in 2001 during the first years of the government of Hugo Chávez. Due to the radical opposition line of RCTV the government started menacing by disapproving the renewal of the broadcast license which was materialized in May 2007<sup>184</sup> with the definite closure of the TV station<sup>185</sup>.

Furthermore, the TV station *Globovision* also started receiving menaces in 2001<sup>186</sup> and in 2003 temporary confiscation of some telecommunication equipments were applied against the TV channel with a final sentence for the permanent application of

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<sup>179</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> Chirinos Carlos, *Venezuela: protesta de “inhabilitados”* (Venezuela: “desqualified’s” protest), at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin\\_america/newsid\\_7503000/7503819.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7503000/7503819.stm), last time consulted on 18 June 2013.

<sup>181</sup> At the moment of the decision there was a list available in internet which was nationally spread but at the moment of writing this investigation the list was not longer available on-line.

<sup>182</sup> Chirinos Carlos, *Venezuela: protesta de “inhabilitados”*, at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin\\_america/newsid\\_7503000/7503819.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7503000/7503819.stm), last time consulted on 18 June 2013.

<sup>183</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 21.

<sup>184</sup> The decision of not renewing the license to RCTV was the cause of a general condemnation of the act from NGO’s, international organizations and the international community besides heavy protests especially among students. President Chávez had a complete rejection to comments received responding with violent declarations. Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, pp. 84-85.

<sup>185</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Tightening the Grip*, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Openly President Chávez declared the TV channel as “enemy of the revolution”, hence enemy of the State. Zuloaga Guillermo, letter to Globovision, 2013, at <http://globovision.com/articulo/carlos-zuloaga-la-venta-de-globovision-ya-se-cerro>, last time consulted on 19 June 2013.



the following administrative sanctions: the suspension of a fine for VEF 582.000.000, 00<sup>187</sup> and the definitive confiscation of the equipments for microwave transmissions alleging that the reach of the spectre of the abovementioned equipments was illegal<sup>188</sup>. This confiscation limited the effective broadcasting of the channel, but despite this sanction, the TV channel continued operating until April 2013<sup>189</sup>.

In views of the radical governmental decision, the remaining TV channels refrained from emitting radical opposition views<sup>190</sup>. Being *Globovision* the only TV channel openly critical to the Bolivarian government with a national wide broadcast. Due to the coverage of a prison riot in 2011, once again the government decided to open an administrative investigation against *Globovision*, out of which it was determined that the mentioned TV station “promoted hatred for political reasons that generated anxiety in the population” and it was imposed a US 2,1 million dollars fine<sup>191</sup>. Furthermore, economical and political issues<sup>192</sup> led to the sale of the TV station to three entrepreneurs allegedly connected to the government on April 2013<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>187</sup> Equivalent to an approximate USD 271.000.000,00 at the official exchange rate of 2003 1USD = 2,15 VEF.

<sup>188</sup> AA40-X-2004-0021, Sentence No. 00381, TSJ, 07 March 2007, at <http://www.tsj.gov.ve/decisiones/spa/Marzo/00381-7307-2007-2003-1545.html>, last time consulted on 20 June 2013.

<sup>189</sup> Al Jazeera, Venezuela sells last critical TV news network, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/06/201361114150623221.html>, last time consulted on 20 June 2013.

<sup>190</sup> On the opposition side it is necessary to mention that due to the existence of few opposition media, the ones that handle opposition information are highly extreme. Since the in – group identity needs to be strengthened the aim was to spread radically critical information with no recognition of good governmental actions. The polarisation affected the veracity of the information since from official TV channels is possible to see only really good news about the country and from the opposition TV channels was only possible to see extreme bad news that would fade the image of the government showing two radical opposed views of the same country. As reference on how the information is handled please check the following video related to the detention of judge Afuni: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHnVzZGBvFI>

<sup>191</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Guillermo Zuloaga former owner of the TV channel in a written communication to the staff when sale was pursued stated: “We are unviable economically because our earnings no longer cover our costs. We can't even raise [employee] salaries enough to compensate for inflation and devaluation. We are unviable politically because we are in a country that is totally polarized, and on the opposite side of a government that wants to see us fail. And we are unviable in the legal sense, because our broadcasting license is ending soon, and there is no will to renew it”, at <http://globovision.com/articulo/carlos-zuloaga-la-venta-de-globovision-ya-se-cerro>, last time consulted on 19 June 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Rueda Manuel, Is Venezuela's Government Silencing Globovision? at [http://abcnews.go.com/ABC\\_Univision/venezuelas-government-silencing-globovision/story?id=18713972#.UcIdUNi3RkK](http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/venezuelas-government-silencing-globovision/story?id=18713972#.UcIdUNi3RkK), last time consulted on 19 June 2013.

Out of this situation the former president of the TV channel was also suffering the consequences of the polarisation issue, since some sectors might consider his decision of selling the TV channel as a limitation to the opposition political project<sup>194</sup>. It is not possible to determine the final destiny of the TV channel, despite the general opinion that considers it will lose its opposition view. So far the TV channel is still on air even though at the moment two of their main journalists<sup>195</sup> were dismissed on the allegations that they were not following the line of thinking of the new board of directors<sup>196</sup>.

Many other cases of political retaliation and restrictions to the freedom of expression towards the opposition representatives have taken place along the 14 years of government<sup>197</sup>. Extreme decisions among the government are strengthening the polarisation. The opposition sector is having less spaces to exercise their fully freedom of expression, which is assuring a more homogeneous view of the country's situation in favour of the government. The application of extreme policies is making the opposition supporters more radical against *chavismo*; hence the chances and spaces for dialogue are more constrained and limited.

#### - ***Right to due process***

Problems with the right to due process have been influenced by the polarisation issue since many judicial decisions are made on a political basis and by the direct influence of the executive, which is not only a violation of human rights but also it hampers the democracy and rule of law, since there is a lack of independence of the judicial power<sup>198</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> Zuloaga Guillermo, letter to Globovision, 2013, at <http://globovision.com/articulo/carlos-zuloaga-la-venta-de-globovision-ya-se-cerro>, last time consulted on 19 June 2013.

<sup>195</sup> Francisco “Kiko” Bautista who ran an openly critical TV show “Buenas Noches”, along with him the other two members of his crew decided resign to their jobs. The second is Nitu Perez Osuna who ranned the TV show “I promise...” also critical and through which citizens could made claims on air. Espacio Publico, Segundo despido a periodista de Globovision, at <http://espaciopublico.org/index.php/noticias/1-libertad-de-expresi/2645-segundo-despido-a-periodista-de-globovision>, last time consulted on 19 June 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>197</sup> For further information and specific cases is possible to consult Human Rights Watch and the Inter – American Court of Human Rights websites in which there are current and past cases available.

<sup>198</sup> President Hugo Chávez had a great influence on the judicial system imposing decisions to this sector that are not discussed such as the withdrawal of Venezuela from the Inter – American Court, the non implementation of the Inter – American Court and other organization's recommendations, and arbitrary

The first example of this situation was the decision of former President Chávez to withdraw the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from the Inter – American Court of Human Rights alleging:

*“It as an “instrument to the service of the hegemony of the United States [...], even though the organism is financed by Latin – American countries and despite the United States does not render economic funds to the ICHR, decisions taken by jurists are used for their expansionist policies [...]”; president Chávez confirmed that “the ICHR is an instrument of the empire (United States) to harm Venezuela, hence the country will withdraw from this tutelage organism”<sup>199</sup>.*

The presidential initiative was approved and supported by the Judicial Power without major discussions. Venezuela has never had a fully independent judicial system<sup>200</sup> but nowadays the level of polarisation in this power is more obvious and difficult to tackle since the Supreme Court openly rejected the principle of separation of powers and publicly expressed they would pledge to the agenda of president Chávez<sup>201</sup>.

The abovementioned example is not only a prove that there is not an appropriate separation of powers, but also another powerful tool for polarisation One example of this is the case of the judge María Lourdes Afiuni who was arbitrarily detained<sup>202</sup> by president Chávez’ order for issuing a sentence in favour of an entrepreneur, Eligio Cedeño who was imprisoned for more than two years without trial. Judge Afiuni based her decision following the recommendations of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on the case, and she was immediately detained by the Department of Intelligence and Prevention Services<sup>203</sup>.

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detentions are among the most evident influences the central government had on the judiciary. Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Ministry of the Popular Power for Communications and Information, “Venezuela as Sovereign Country will Withdraw from the ICHR”, at <http://www.minci.gob.ve/2012/07/venezuela-como-pais-soberano-se-retirara-de-la-cidh/>, last time consulted on 20 June 2013.

<sup>200</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>201</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>202</sup> On 7 June 2013 Judge María Lourdes Afiuni was granted parole for health reasons, *El Universal, Cronología del Caso de la Juez María Lourdes Afiuni* (Cronology of the case of Judge María Lourdes Afiuni), at <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/130614/cronologia-del-caso-de-la-juez-maria-lourdes-afiuni>, last time consulted 11 July 2013.

<sup>203</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 19.

Pursuing her job properly and facing the consequences of not following the political line of thinking of the president in turn had irreversible repercussions on her life and career. This decision also influenced the proper functioning of the institution since the former president had the power to make such an arbitrary decision, it was implied that any other judge that would not pursue its mandate according to the president would also suffer the same consequences<sup>204</sup>.

- ***Right to dignity and non – discrimination, right to life, right to public security, and social, economic and cultural rights***

It is not possible to assured that there has been a direct influence of the polarisation on the violations to dignity and non – discrimination, right to life, right to public security, and social, economic and cultural rights, but it certainly has ease the path for issues related to the violation of such rights to become a common denominator in the lives of Venezuelan people.

Political discrimination and intolerance are not only present among political actors<sup>205</sup> but also among the population. Between citizens the discrimination and intolerance are determined by preconceptions related to the social origin, the place of living, the economical class and the political position. The political situation brought out traces of racism in a multi-ethnic society that as such should not be racist<sup>206</sup>. Just by considering the clothes a person is wearing, its behaviour or the place a person lives, it is possible to negatively prejudge a person qualifying he/her as part of one group or the other.

*“Polarisation has revealed a marked social distance, a stereotyped preconception of the groups, a differentiation that marks ideological differences, but also the subjective characteristics taken by the exclusion and more subtle or grotesque forms of class, sexist and racist discriminations which are expressed in different manners of group dynamics, protests or celebrations in public spaces (charts, masks, dances, music, etc.)”<sup>207</sup>.*

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<sup>204</sup> House of Commons of Canada, 2012, p. 20.

<sup>205</sup> Vid supra, right to political participation.

<sup>206</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>207</sup> Ibidem.

Cultural rights have been hampered since urban places have been marked by each opposing group. Neighbourhoods, cities and regions have been divided into sectors pro or counter – government<sup>208</sup>. The group differentiation and the lack of places for interaction has helped the disappearance of the dialogue, the values lost their collective meaning and each sector builds up its own conception of the reality by taking the information it obtains from different sources either by media, rumours and personal experiences which increases its collective hermetic nature and considers the contrary group as a menace, having constant fear of being attacked, which produces anxiety leading to a self protection behaviour to defend itself or attack the other. In a context of menaces, aggressions, denial and rejection of the opponent, expressions of massive discontentment, the perception of civic protest as useless and the increasing impunity, closes the path for non – violent alternatives, producing the normalization of the violence. Institutions of the state as well as social sectors representing different political positions can justify the violation of human rights, and assassinations, torture, popular judgements<sup>209</sup>, coup d'état and even war can become an aim<sup>210</sup>.

Among the rights contained in the covenant of civil and political rights, we can mention the prohibition of torture, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, the right to equality and non-discrimination, the right to dissent, the duty to protect and the right to an impartial tribunal, among others. This recognizes that based on the value of dignity, the equality among individuals, the responsibilities and duties that each individual has upon others, are necessary to ensure the appropriate enjoyment of freedom<sup>211</sup> but the political intolerance among the institutions, political actors and the population is affecting the normal coexistence and the country is slowly undergoing through social and political chaos.

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<sup>208</sup> Lozada, 2008, p. 91.

<sup>209</sup> The working group for the Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights Council of the United Nations, highlighted their concern brought up by the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture with regard to death of children in police custody, execution of criminals and the failure to pursue an impartial investigation among other important concerns through which is possible to imply the lack of values, respect for life and impunity. A/HRC/WG.6/12/VEN/2, 25 July 2011, paras. 24, 25, 26 – 35.

<sup>210</sup> Lozada, 2008, pp. 96 – 97.

<sup>211</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 19 December 1966, Preamble.

### 3.3.3 The Polarisation and its Consequences for Good Governance

Good governance is a concept related to the promotion of good values, especially those linked to statecraft such as efficiency, non-corruptibility, and responsiveness to civil society. Being the government the body in charge of providing appropriate means of living to the population, it must undertake its administration complemented with the elements of responsiveness to public demands, transparency on the use of resources and equitability for the distribution of wealth<sup>212</sup>.

The resolution 2000/64 from to the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights identifies as the elements for good governance, the following:

- a) Transparency
- b) Responsibility
- c) Accountability
- d) Participation
- e) Responsiveness (to the needs of people)<sup>213</sup>

It is a concept related to development of an appropriate environment that assures the enjoyment of human rights for all and which facilitates the path for the positive growth of a country<sup>214</sup>.

The polarisation in Venezuela has influenced actors related to the public administration to be focused on the struggle for political domination and imposition of a system, the struggle based on power relations affects the appropriate functioning of state institutions in central and local governments; the lack of consensus produced by the confrontation of two different ideologies has lead to the evolution of adversarial institutions and intense political confrontation with non constructive solutions<sup>215</sup>: the central government excludes the opposition from policy deliberations, and the opposition expresses its inconformity through marches, boycotts and other type of obstructive activities<sup>216</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> Chowdbury and Slarstedt, 2005, p. 4.

<sup>213</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Good Governance and Human Rights, at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/GoodGovernanceIndex.aspx>, last time consulted on 29 June 2013.

<sup>214</sup> Chowdbury and Slarstedt, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 11.

<sup>216</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 69.

The inefficiency of the public administration to respond to the needs of the citizens, in different areas, has influenced the climate of civil unrest in Venezuela in addition to the effects caused by the political polarisation:

One of the main issues related to the abovementioned electoral process was the postulation of Nicolás Maduro as candidate to the presidency; due to the fact that the Venezuelan constitution in its chapter II on the executive powers, first section on the president of the Republic, article 229 states that the vice – president in office cannot be elected as president of the republic<sup>217</sup> but the Supreme Court of Justice applied the principle of “administrative continuity” in the moment that Hugo Chávez (due to medical problems), was unable to officially take office for the new term 2013 – 2019. Therefore, according to the interpretation of the Supreme Court of Justice (on article 239 numeral 8 which states that one of the responsibilities of the Vice President is to replace the president in case of a temporary absence) Nicolás Maduro was named president in charge, violating furthermore articles 57 and 58 on electoral regulations, which state that public functionaries must detach from public office in order to run for elections<sup>218</sup>.

The Institute of European Studies, which participated in an electoral observation mission during the presidential elections carried out on April 2013, described that the general scenario of the country is of judicial uncertainty and civil unrest, furthermore the eagerness of the central government to keep the power and give continuity to the legacy Hugo Chávez, showed the lack of neutrality of the state institutions; the fact that political actors are dedicated to confrontations rather than to a stable political debate as well as the level of confrontation between the political actors transmitted to the citizens, influences even more the polarisation issue<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>217</sup> Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, article 229 on the President of the Republic, at [http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Constitucion\\_Venezuela.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Constitucion_Venezuela.pdf), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>218</sup> Institute for European Studies, Electoral Observation Mission for the Presidential Elections in Venezuela, p. 4, at [http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe\\_Final\\_Observacion\\_Electoral\\_Venezuela\\_14\\_abril\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe_Final_Observacion_Electoral_Venezuela_14_abril_2013.pdf), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>219</sup> Institute for European Studies, Electoral Observation Mission for the Presidential Elections in Venezuela, p. 6, at [http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe\\_Final\\_Observacion\\_Electoral\\_Venezuela\\_14\\_abril\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iaee.eu/material/Informe_Final_Observacion_Electoral_Venezuela_14_abril_2013.pdf), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

On April 14 the National Electoral Council (CNE) declared as the winner of the presidential elections Mr. Nicolás Maduro (with 7.587.532 votes, 50,61%)<sup>220</sup> which represented a margin of victory of 1,59 percent (234,935 votes)<sup>221</sup> above Henrique Capriles Radonski (who obtained 7.363.264 representing 49,12%). Such narrow results caused a social turmoil<sup>222</sup>; untrusting the results, the opposition formally requested a recount of votes and later presented a motion before the Supreme Court of Justice in order to impugn the electoral results. At the present moment no fail has been issued by the tribunal<sup>223</sup>. The reluctance and lack of trust of the official results is reflected on the population which also denies the authority of Nicolás Maduro as president, increasing the fragility of the social situation.

The continuous political division has lead authorities to blame one another about different problems, lacking the needed consensus and communication that might lead to durable and plausible solutions. In this regard, one of the problems that has more resonance is the issue of food and other basic products shortage<sup>224</sup> out of which there have been long debates on which the parties have blame the other for the abovementioned situation, as follows:

- Governmental position: during a formal act before the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) for the recognition of the improvements that Venezuela and other Latin American nations have had on food access, president Nicolás Maduro stated that an “economic attack and an economic war in

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<sup>220</sup> CNE, Presidential Elections 2013, at [http://www.cne.gob.ve/resultado\\_presidencial\\_2013/r/1/reg\\_000000.html](http://www.cne.gob.ve/resultado_presidencial_2013/r/1/reg_000000.html), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>221</sup> Lefebvre and Beeton, A Timeline of Venezuelan Opposition Reactions to the Recent Elections, at <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/9750>, last time consulted on 30 June 2013.

<sup>222</sup> Al Jazeera, Venezuela at the Cross Road, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestoryamericas/2013/04/201341873528724566.html>, last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>223</sup> De La Rosa, Capriles is considering going on protest if the Supreme Court of Justice does not make a decision on the impugnation, at <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/130625/capriles-evaluara-ir-a-protesta-si-el-tsj-no-decide-sobre-impugnacion#.UcnGom9oHYU.twitter>, last time consulted on 30 June 2013.

<sup>224</sup> López Virginia, Venezuela toilet paper shortage sends ordinary lives around the bend, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/23/venezuela-toilet-paper-shortage>, last time consulted on 30 June 2013.



Venezuela is affecting the food supply”<sup>225</sup>. According to the government and its followers, the scarcity of basic products is also a consequence of media manipulation from the opposition “promoting an excessive demand of such products”<sup>226</sup>.

- Opposition position: the representative of the opposition Ramón Guillermo Aveledo rejected the declaration of president Nicolás Maduro and stated that the scarcity of products is due to the inefficient plans of development and production carried out by the government, since through its policies of invasions and expropriations of lands and due to the lack of judicial security has affected workers of this field and the agricultural industry has been strongly affected by corruption and negligent administration<sup>227</sup>.

In a hypothetic situation if both sides are able to dialogue and work together, different durable solutions could be reached. On the other hand, according to the National Institute of Statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas – INE*) the shortage of products responds to the inflation and the scarcity can be tackle through the increase on the production which got stock due to the “unproductive character of economics” during the 14 years of mandate of Hugo Chávez<sup>228</sup>; on the other hand the FAO representative in Venezuela Marcelo Resende considered the situation as a circumstantial crisis and explained that the scarcity in Venezuela can be solved through production and mentioned that the government had a prompt reaction and solved the situation through

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<sup>225</sup> Venezuelan News Agency, Venezuela requested support to FAO in order to monitor the offer and demand of food, at <http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/venezuela-solicita-fao-apoyo-para-establecer-sistema-oferta-y-consumo-alimentos>, last time consulted on 30 June 2013.

<sup>226</sup> La Razón, Venezuela: opposition is accused for the shortage of toilet paper, at [http://www.larazon.com.ar/internacional/Venezuela-acusan-oposicion-agotamiento-higienico\\_0\\_459900152.html](http://www.larazon.com.ar/internacional/Venezuela-acusan-oposicion-agotamiento-higienico_0_459900152.html), last time consulted 30 June 2013.

<sup>227</sup> El Nacional, Opposition blames government for scarcity, at [http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/aveledo-de-democratica-desabastecimiento-escasez-guanipa-guillermo-la-mesa-MUD-produccion-ramon-tomas-unidad\\_0\\_189581195.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/aveledo-de-democratica-desabastecimiento-escasez-guanipa-guillermo-la-mesa-MUD-produccion-ramon-tomas-unidad_0_189581195.html) last time consulted on 01 June 2013.

<sup>228</sup> La Información, *INE considera que la actual escasez en Venezuela es “circunstancial”* (INE considered the current scarcity situation in Venezuela as circumstantial), at [http://noticias.lainformacion.com/economia-negocios-y-finanzas/importaciones/ine-considera-que-la-actual-escasez-en-venezuela-es-circunstancial\\_1oUvSyVOUUzUeo8r2k5472/](http://noticias.lainformacion.com/economia-negocios-y-finanzas/importaciones/ine-considera-que-la-actual-escasez-en-venezuela-es-circunstancial_1oUvSyVOUUzUeo8r2k5472/), last time consulted on 30 June 2013.

importations but there is still the need to increase the production<sup>229</sup>. Therefore, different actors agreed on the solutions to the issue but there is no visible cooperation between the government and the opposition.

Both political actors under analysis base their positions on real politics aims for power domination, taking advantage of the possibility that polarisation positively influences electoral victories or defections<sup>230</sup>. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into consideration that the realistic approach to politics has intrinsic signs of possible self – destruction<sup>231</sup>.

The polarisation is affecting the good governance due to the political division, poor dialogue and lack of consensus which leads to an inefficient public administration. The aim is not to discuss which is the most effective system for development, but to argue that the lack of harmony among political actors produces an inefficient response to problems<sup>232</sup> and it could lead to a major civil unrest not only related to the polarisation but also to the non – satisfaction of the different needs of individuals i.e. proper access to food and services, security, freedom of expression, economical freedom, increase of job opportunities, among many others. Considering the fragile situation in Venezuela and applying to it the theory of needs, “there are human needs that *will* be pursued. In response to the structural violence there will be resistance to the imposed conditions, violent resistance if necessary”<sup>233</sup>. If political actors do not analyse properly the electoral results which, either transparent or not, shown the country is divided in half, and do not find a consensus on the political decisions they will be confronted with social turmoil as it has happened in the past and one example of this was the abovementioned *Caracazo*.

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<sup>229</sup> El Nacional, *FAO: la escasez de Venezuela se resuelve con producción* (FAO: Venezuelan scarcity can be solved with production), at [http://www.el-nacional.com/economia/FAO-escasez-Venezuela-resuelve-produccion\\_0\\_208179345.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/economia/FAO-escasez-Venezuela-resuelve-produccion_0_208179345.html), last time consulted on 03 July 2013.

<sup>230</sup> Ponniah and Eastwood, 2011, p. 81.

<sup>231</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 14.

<sup>232</sup> Ibidem, pp. 13-14.

<sup>233</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 33.

## **CHAPTER 4. SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES THAT COULD LEAD TO A PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF THE POLARISATION**

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Before starting the discussion of this section it is necessary to take into consideration that Venezuela, as well as other countries in Latin America has a historical background of high levels of poverty, marginalisation, corruption and impunity, which facilitates the increase of violence in the society affecting the proper development of the country<sup>234</sup>. Therefore, the focus of this section will be the political violence as a consequence of polarisation with disregard of the generalised violence, which comprises itself a separated thesis and its origins are not related to the current political process in the country.

In order to pursue the aforementioned aim, it is necessary to bear in mind that the political violence is a division of the structural violence which is a term that describes damaging deprivations caused by the nature of social institutions and policies: therefore it is an avoidable violence. It might also be related to sanctions (such as economical) and imposed discrimination. It is related to political and administrative decisions made by some and adversely applied to others<sup>235</sup>. It is enforced into the person, social and world spaces and is unintended; structural violence can originate intended violence which can be reproduced only in humans as individuals or inside collectives<sup>236</sup>, therefore there is the need to reinforce the culture of peace in order to avoid escalation of confrontations.

### **4.1 Negotiation processes undertaken in Venezuela**

Different activities have been undertaken in Venezuela in order to promote the restoration of the dialogue, peace, democratic values, respect, tolerance and consensus. Such activities have been implemented among different sectors of the society: governmental and non-governmental organisations, communal councils, schools and others. The organisation of such activities has been done in collaboration between

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<sup>234</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 38, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 32.

<sup>236</sup> Galtung, 1996, p. 31.

national and international organisations aiming to spread their knowledge about “methods and tools for the constructive resolution of conflicts” or “alternative means for conflict resolution”<sup>237</sup>.

#### **4.1.1 Contributions from international organisations**

It was really active in 2002 as a response to the strong tension in which the country was submerged after the coup d'état that took place on 11 April and the posterior days of riots on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.

##### **- *The Carter Centre mediation process from June 2002 – February 2005***

The amplitude of the support provided by the Carter Centre is too wide to mention all its activities undertaken in Venezuela. Therefore, only some of the activities that started in 2002 will be mentioned and that were addressed to the government, the media and the civil society.

Originally invited by the government followed later by an invitation from the opposition, the Carter Centre started its activities in Venezuela since June 2002, when the polarisation issue exponentially escalated after the coup d'état on April 11<sup>th</sup>. The Carter Centre along with the collaboration of the Organisation of American States and the United Nations Development Programme established a group known as “Tripartite”. After the designation of Francisco Diez as the permanent representative in Caracas, the negotiation for the “Declaration of Principles for Peace and Democracy in Venezuela” started, this declaration was signed by representatives of the central government, the opposition (in that moment represented by the *Coordinadora Democrática* –Democratic Coordinator–) and by the Secretary General of the OAS at that time César Gaviria<sup>238</sup>. Through the signing of this declaration the parties expressed that they would engage with the Venezuelan people in:

- ❖ Finding solutions to problems among Venezuelans, within the framework of the constitution and laws of the country.

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<sup>237</sup> Mireles, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>238</sup> The Carter Centre, 2005, p. 3.

- ❖ Adhere to democratic principles and justice and the repudiation of violence that had caused the death of people.
- ❖ Finding paths to strengthen the democratic coexistence and total rejection to the breach of the norms that govern it.
- ❖ Initiating and holding sincere conversations among all sectors in order to find solutions for the political conflict, which contributes to the inequalities existing in the country.
- ❖ To expressly reiterate their request for support to the working group composed by members of the Organisation of American States (OAS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Carter Centre.
- ❖ Confirm their commitment to collaborate with the aforementioned working group in order to undergo through preparatory phases that would lead to a process of assisted and verifiable agreements that would made possible to find political solutions within the constitutional framework.
- ❖ Their conviction that Venezuela and its people would know how to peacefully and democratically overcome the situation assuring the rule of law and dignity for all citizens<sup>239</sup>.

Later by September – October the OAS and the Carter Centre began their assistance to establish the terms of reference that would ease the establishment of the *Mesa de Negociación y Acuerdos* (Roundtable for Negotiations and Agreements). During this phase of the process the Carter Centre’s representatives realised that high political level negotiations were insufficient to tackle the high rates of polarisation already spread and increasing among the society, noticing that the support from the highest political spheres and the common citizens was needed<sup>240</sup>.

Even though meetings were taking place almost on a daily basis, negotiations were dominated by hostility and the opposition decided to launch an oil strike which led to the withdrawal of the government from negotiations. The oil strike started on 2 December 2002, lasting until February 2003, it marked the starting point of the struggle between the industrial sector and the government to control the oil industry. The Carter

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<sup>239</sup> The Carter Centre, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>240</sup> The Carter Centre, 2005, p. 3.

Centre maintained its effort on keeping an open dialogue to influence the negotiations, out of which came the idea of an electoral solution through referendum, after taking this decision the Mesa resumed. This was followed by the formation of a group of friends to help negotiations to move forward<sup>241</sup>.

Once the oil strike ended, the government found its popularity augmented but it was still frightened by a possible escalate of violence or another coup, therefore with the support of the group of friends a “Declaration Against Violence, for Peace and Democracy” was signed<sup>242</sup>.

At the same time the Carter Centre addressed to media owners and the former Minister of Interior and Justice, Diosdado Cabello started a negotiation process assisted by William Ury<sup>243</sup> out of which both parties were able to sign a confidence-building commitment which was unsuccessful<sup>244</sup>.

The Carter Centre supported the peace initiatives that started being developed at different levels of the society, again with the contribution of William Ury and the support of the United States agency for International Development, which with the support of experts on constructive transformation of conflict from Argentina started working on a community level to prepare for the visit of Ury in order to identify the social leaders and civic organisations to develop activities at the grassroots. Thanks to this process the working group “*Constructores de Paz*” –Peacebuilders– was formed<sup>245</sup>.

Several different projects were carried out from June 2002 to February 2005. The activities that were also spread nationally wide, counted with the valuable participation of different non – governmental organisations, the civil society, communal leaders, political actors and international organisations<sup>246</sup>. The influence of these activities promoted the strengthening of the culture of peace necessary in that moment<sup>247</sup>.

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<sup>241</sup> Brazil, Mexico, United States, Chile, Spain and Portugal. The Carter Centre, 2005, p. 4.

<sup>242</sup> Which not only contained similar statements on democracy and rule of law as the previous declaration, this one included the issue of violent speech and verbal aggressions and different forms of violence. The Carter Center, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>243</sup> Expert mediator from Harvard University invited by the Carter Centre, author of the “third side” thesis. The Carter Center, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>244</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.

<sup>245</sup> The Carter Center, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>246</sup> Ibidem, pp. 5 – 10.

<sup>247</sup> Mireles, 2007, p. 5.

Despite all the efforts of the international community, the polarisation increased after 2005. The government is more reluctant for international mediation or critical opinions: Venezuela retired from the Inter – American Court of Human Rights for considering it an organisation inclined in favour of the United States<sup>248</sup>. Furthermore, in view of the riots that occurred after the elections on 14 April 2013 along with the violent clash between pro – government and opposition parliamentarians, members of the international community (Peru, Spain and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights)<sup>249</sup> requested president Nicolás Maduro to intervene in the conflict, to which the president answered with a complete rejection and requested the non-intervention in Venezuela’s internal affairs<sup>250</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 Contributions from national organisations

In Venezuela exists around 1.000 NGO’s<sup>251</sup> many of them with a peace building approach. Their focus remains mainly in tackling the issue of the generalised violence but they also have dedicated some research and investigation to the analysis of the political violence and the polarisation phenomenon. Among the non-governmental organisations and institutions that had contributed to the analysis of the political violence and polarisation in Venezuela are: the Foundation *Centro Gumilla*, *PROVEA – Programa Venezolano de Educación y Acción en Derechos Humanos* (Venezuelan Programme on Action and Education on Human Rights), *Paz en Movimiento* (Peace in Movement), *Aquí Cabemos Todos* (There is Space for Everyone), *Red de Apoyo Justicia y Paz* (Justice and Peace Support Network)<sup>252</sup>, among others.

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<sup>248</sup> *Ministerio de Comunicación e Información* (Ministry of Communication and Information), *Venezuela como país soberano se retirara de la CIDH* (Venezuela as sovereign country decides to withdraw from the ICHR), at <http://www.minci.gob.ve/2012/07/venezuela-como-pais-soberano-se-retirara-de-la-cidh/>, last time consulted on 26 June 2013.

<sup>249</sup> *Quadratin Mexico*, *Repudia Maduro “injerencia” de la CIDH en Venezuela* (Maduro rejects ICHR “interventionism” in Venezuela), at <http://www.quadratinmexico.com/repudia-maduro-injerencia-de-la-cidh-en-venezuela/>, last time consulted on 26 June 2013.

<sup>250</sup> *Venezolana de Televisión*, *Venezuela rechaza declaraciones injerencistas de canciller peruano* (Venezuela Rejects Interventionist declarations of the Peruvian Chancellor), at <http://www.vtv.gob.ve/articulos/2013/05/03/maduro-rechaza-declaraciones-injerencista-de-canciller-peruano-8106.html>, last time consulted of 26 June 2013.

<sup>251</sup> *Quijada Reinaldo*, *Las ONG son Caballos de Troya* (NGO’s are Trojan Horses), at <http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/a114026.html>, last time consulted 26 June 201.

<sup>252</sup> The Carter Centre, 2005, p. 10.

One of the main challenges they have to face is the unwillingness of the government to support them. In many occasions these organisations published reports regarding the governmental performance, denouncing its deficiencies or violations. Due to the reluctance of the government to critical opinions, these organisation have been marginalised and there is a lack of cooperation from the government side, and some of them have even denounced threatens and harassment from the government<sup>253</sup>.

According to the opinion of government members, NGO's are Trojan horses hidden behind a mask of social consciousness and justice and which plan to build relations of dependency in favour of the empire<sup>254</sup>, i.e. United States. Radical opinions from the government stated that NGO's and especially those working for the defence of political rights are promoters of destabilisation plans against the government<sup>255</sup>. These opinions on NGO's are adding further tension to the lack of dialogue and cooperation<sup>256</sup>. Due to mutual radical positioning, the polarisation issue is also hampering the possibility of contributions from other actors that might have valuable experience to contribute to re-establish political stability; either because such actors are strongly critical of the government or because the government is not supporting them, which reduces the chances of cooperation.

It is necessary to highlight that several governmental and non-governmental organisations are undertaking different activities to tackle the problem of the general violence. At the moment the government is undertaking different plans to deal with crime and promote peace<sup>257</sup>; and several non-governmental organisations are undertaking activities to appeal to the youth and to avoid violence through the promotion of arts or sports. Nevertheless, as mentioned before this analysis will only be

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<sup>253</sup> United States Department of State, 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Venezuela, 19 April 2013, p. 21, at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/517e6c5b16.html>, last time consulted 26 June 2013.

<sup>254</sup> Quijada Reinaldo, *Las ONG son Caballos de Troya* (NGO's are Trojan Horses), at <http://www.aporrea.org/tiburona/a114026.html>, last time consulted 26 June 2013.

<sup>255</sup> United States Department of State, 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Venezuela, 19 April 2013, p. 22, at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/517e6c5b16.html>, last time consulted 26 June 2013.

<sup>256</sup> Through communal councils and other civil associations the government is implementing policies against generalised violence and for the peace such as “*Gran Misión A Toda Vida Venezuela*” (Great Mission Full Life Venezuela), for further information: <http://www.misionatodavidavenezuela.gob.ve/noticias/163-organizaciones-comunitarias-de-catia-participan-en-mesas-de-trabajo-en-pro-de-la-paz-y-la-vida>.

<sup>257</sup> Caselli Irene, Fighting Crime in Petare, Venezuela's toughest slum, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-23181510>, last time consulted 05 July 2013.



focused on the political violence which up to this moment has not been successfully managed.

#### **4.2 The current situation of Venezuela and the importance of building cultures of peace**

Even though until the present time political violence has not reached a critical level and is considered to be low – intensity political violence<sup>258</sup>, the thin line between peace and conflict is unstable, therefore there is the need to find a consensus or a way to rebuild the stability and the dialogue in order to avoid an escalation in the confrontations; *chavismo* and opposition need to undergo through a process of self-criticism, accepting the current situation of the country as to respond accordingly and recognize their contrary in order to restore the dialogue<sup>259</sup> that would enhance the political system and avoid the possibility of a social explosion.

Venezuela is undergoing through a change of paradigm. This change exposed the confrontation between two opposed ideologies each one seeking for the power to dominate. The daily exposure to conflict and violence leads to an environment of distress, anxiety and insecurity<sup>260</sup> and while the political division is lead by confrontation is less possible to reach an effective good governance that allows political actors in charge of the public administration to effectively tackle other general problems affecting the country and avoiding possible turmoil among the population. Both groups have opposed methods to search for a solution to country problems and their lack of consensus has lead to adversarial institutions and political confrontation<sup>261</sup>, following the idea of John Burton:

*“[...] Both have become increasingly interest – oriented. The constituencies of both are now universally anxious about their futures, but*

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<sup>258</sup> International Crisis Group, Report No. 38, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>259</sup> Infante Alfredo, *Venezuela: la polarización social ya no se expresa en polarización política* (Venezuela: the social polarisation is not longer expressed in the political polarisation), at <http://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/venezuela-la-polarizacion-social-ya-no-se-expresa-en-la-polarizacion-politica/>, last time consulted on 10 June 2013.

<sup>260</sup> Burton, 1997, p. XV.

<sup>261</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 11.

*find it impossible to move from an ideological and, therefore, confrontational stance, in tackling their shared problems”<sup>262</sup>.*

If *chavismo* and opposition continue in a blocked attitude towards their conflict, needs of the general population for better life conditions, security, and access to job, food and services among many others might drive a conflict far more complex than the political one, since such problems are not efficiently tackled due to the impact that polarisation has had on governance. A democratically elected government representing only 50% of the electorate do not meet the needs of all the constituencies. Therefore, even though the group in power has the authority to put in place new political lines the dissatisfaction of the unrepresented fraction of the population might claim for responses; in this scenario anticipation and analysis of deep source of possible social turmoil might be part of the decision-making process in order to avoid it; even if is not possible to realistically state when future violence might erupt or if it actually will. The importance is to tackle problems on time and not finding poor solutions once it had emerged<sup>263</sup>.

The UN resolution A/RES/52/13 determines that the culture of peace involves attitudes and behaviours and rejects violence, aiming to prevent conflicts and addressing rooted causes of it, in order to restore the dialogue and negotiation. The culture of peace should be spread by the government and the civil society<sup>264</sup>, but if governmental parties are confronted and reflecting the confrontation among citizens, the methods for building peace will not be successful even if the civil society is implementing them unilaterally.

According to Vamik Volkan conceptions, following a deep evaluation of conducts and interests among leaders due to the extreme importance of their personalities and defining the dynamics in a large-group identity, are key elements to find a successful peace building method<sup>265</sup>. Even though its complexity and slowness, building a culture of peace among political actors could positively influence their ways of communication<sup>266</sup> which would be reflected in the population and enhance their

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<sup>262</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>263</sup> Burton, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>264</sup> Höck and others, 2011, p. 14.

<sup>265</sup> Höck and others, 2011, p. 34.

<sup>266</sup> Höck and others, 2011, p. 71.

performance in accomplishing their duties and might ease the restoration of the tolerance and non-discrimination among the people, opening the space for dialogue.

Shared habits are the core of cultures among the members of a group. These habits are connected to common basic beliefs, values and attitudes. All this is learned by role-models, self-experience and feedback from important persons of the relating groups in family, neighbourhood, school etc., as well as by stories about history and heroes of the large group. Every person has learned different cultures as a member of a nation, ethnic population, religion, family, etc., as well as a girl or man, urban or rural, student or practitioner, vocational training etc. These cultural dimensions are not coherent. They are partly contradictory and can change sometimes<sup>267</sup>. Last 14 years of Venezuelan politics had a major influence in the conduct and culture of the population. Political polarisation is now influent in the behaviour of people either as an individual or as a group since the political leadership have had a major role in the confrontational stance in which the country is.

These differences among the members of a society might lead to a conflict of interests. Therefore, following their identities individuals gather in their respective groups in accordance with their respective leadership and political programs and have to confront each other with the arguments in debates, sometimes also in a hard way in order to defend their group identity. But this “conflict engagement” (as Rothman call it) must be framed in a common problem-solving strategy that uses confrontations as a mean for finding new and better solutions. This is the positive function of conflicts. The border between dysfunctional and functional conflicts is the acceptance of the identity of the other<sup>268</sup>; forcing a group or members of a group to change cultural habits and believes is a threatening to the identity of the other and the identity is not negotiable. Therefore is necessary to recognize the other in order to build a problem-solving dialogue.

Through the analysis of the Venezuelan polarisation the aim was to understand the causes of the polarisation and the current position of the confronted groups. Due to the

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<sup>267</sup> Prof. Dr. Alexander Redlich, Department of Psychology – Centre for Key Competencies, University of Hamburg, 6 July 2013.

<sup>268</sup> Prof. Dr. Alexander Redlich, Department of Psychology – Centre for Key Competencies, University of Hamburg, 6 July 2013.

polarised situation and the lack of dialogue it was necessary to remark the importance of peace building methods as means for opening the dialogue and prevent an escalation in the confrontation. Such a complex enterprise needs deeper analysis and study of the actors and societal behaviours currently happening. For Jay Rothman, conflict resolution provides help to tackle the conflicts in a safe manner, the idea is to observe the antagonism, understand it and make the best choices about it. First observing the lower ground differences, then observing the common ground and finally reaching a higher ground that helps creating new strategies. The deep analysis of interests, behaviours and aims, helps to make the decision on the best type of intervention in the conflict<sup>269</sup>. Re-building the dialogue among the political leadership might serve as an example that can be reflected in the behaviour of the population, it might also strengthen any effort made by the civil society to build cultures of peace, since political leadership is a role-model that has a major relevance in the current Venezuelan situation.

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<sup>269</sup> Höck and others, 2011, p. 29.

## CONCLUSION

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### **a) On the political polarisation**

Through this investigation it was possible to observe that the polarisation had its deep roots on the progressive development of social marginalisation among the poorest population due to the neglected administration of the oil revenues during the 1980's and before.

Authors might argue that the polarisation was produced by political actors as a strategy to concentrate votes by gathering the majority of the population in one group as followers of the Bolivarian revolution. Nevertheless, is undeniable that an important number of the population was left at the margin of the oil boom wealth, this marginalisation cumulated a feeling of resentment among this part of the population that was left behind from the benefits of development.

Therefore, despite the polarisation served for the political purposes it is necessary to remark that the empowerment of the population thanks to the current political process is a fact. Nowadays, people are fully conscious about their rights, and the documentation process undertaken at the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution effectively awarded them with a full recognition of their rights and duties as citizens.

The use of polarisation for political purposes and the polarisation due to social resentment overlapped and the use given by Hugo Chávez to resentment in his political speech as a way to appeal the masses was one of the main features that influenced the polarisation beyond the change towards a socialist system.

The use of diminishing words and intolerance transmitted through the speech are reflected in the behaviours of rejection and disrespect that both groups express each other. This also influenced the fact that supporters of the opposition believe that the only way to overcome the different problems in the country is only by winning future presidential elections.

## **b) The political implications at national and international level**

Nonetheless, the situation is far more complex than simply winning the presidential elections, since besides the polarisation issue there are several facts that are in currently in the political arena, just as an example it is possible to mention:

### ***Among domestic affairs:***

- ❖ The government built different groups of self-governance, which are called communal councils. Despite they give the central government some critics and in many cases even express their discontent with regards of the inefficiency of the government to accomplished some of their requests, these groups are still fully supportive of *chavismo*, since thanks to president Chávez they were empowered and have actual political participation;

- ❖ The military forces declared themselves *chavistas*;

- ❖ The wide increase of public employees who support the government in order to secure their job positions. Currently public employees reach approximately 2.000.000 people, which is also impacting the Treasury and might pose further economical challenges to the government at a medium and long term;

- ❖ The different challenges in the security area since the government organised armed groups for the defence of the revolution; and its sympathy for internal armed collectives that declared themselves *chavistas*;

### ***Among international affairs:***

- ❖ The turn in the international relations from changing classic international partnership to other countries rather than the United States;

- ❖ The progresses made in the negotiation of the Colombian peace process; even if this is still in progress and the benefits and consequences are still to be observed;

- ❖ The empowerment of the Latin American region in view of the political influence the country has in the region due to its position against the influence of the United States;

- ❖ The international cooperation agreements signed with different countries especially in Latin America;

Therefore, the domination power is still of major importance, the fact that Hugo Chávez underwent to presidential elections on the 7 October 2012 despite of his health proves the paramount importance that has for the *chavismo* to maintain the power, therefore consensual positions are not expected from any side, as while more extreme one acts the more extreme becomes the other.

Finally, the controversy surrounding the presidential election on 14 April 2013, which is still on contestation before the Supreme Court of Justice is feeding the conflictive relation between political actors. The government is posing obstacles to the opposition for not recognising Nicolás Maduro as President; the opposition disrespect the authority of the President; and the lack trust and transparency surrounding the functioning of the Court is augmenting the tension.

### **c) The importance of building cultures of peace**

The restoration of the dialogue among these political actors seems highly difficult from a political point of view but in order to restore the good governance it is necessary to find a way for this two actors to be able to debate in a non-violent way.

Previous exercises of negotiations were not fully successful and even though there are no major academic publications that provides a critical analysis in this regard, it might be possible to argue that the negotiation processes carried out in Venezuela by the Carter Centre were not durable due different reasons: the negotiation process undertaken was leaded by specialists in legal negotiations; the context in which negotiations took place was related to the economical shift and the opposition at that moment was represented by FEDECAMARAS (the entrepreneur chamber), therefore, negotiations were leaded by economical interests and not political and social ones; the fact that the Carter Centre is from to the United States might influence the reluctance of some of the government's representatives to follow their recommendations.

Currently the situation is different; even though the *chavismo* is still radical, the absence of Chávez left visible fissures among the group; on the other hand the opposition built up an unity and enhanced its political performance and representation towards the population that do not support *chavismo*. Groups are reluctant to start a dialogue and it seems the political situation will follow its natural course at the moment.

Any attempt to help the opposition and the *chavismo* to open up for dialogue requires a deep inter-disciplinary study of the interests and needs of both actors, and the election of the mediator should be done based on the present paradigmatic situation.

As complex and slow as it is, building cultures of peace is of paramount importance to restore relations among the civil society disregarding their social level. Venezuela is currently affected by high rates of violence which is also influenced by the confrontational politics; the absence of Hugo Chávez let unrepresented a large amount of the population who now has to re-build its individual and group identities. On the opposition side, the population needs to understand there was a shift of paradigm and the national system might not return to what was before Chávez' era. The population has to find again its Venezuelan identity and find common cultural and historical characteristics between one group and the other. Values such as respect and the rescue of institutions like family must be recovered at all levels and building and cultures of peace might help pursuing these aims.

#### **d) Limitations and challenges**

- ❖ Different limitations and challenges were presented during the investigation, one of them was the death of president Chávez which occurred at the beginning of the dissertation and was a major importance for the change of the status quo of the country.
- ❖ The information is constantly changing since new controversies erupted while writing, such as the clash in the national assembly and the protests against the electoral results, which implies the limitation on publications and literary sources.
- ❖ The area of expertise of the author, since the analysis was done from a social-psychological point of view with regards to the polarisation and peace building methods.
- ❖ The complexity of the analysis of peace building methods which requires a full individual investigation and expertise.
- ❖ Time constrains since the deep analysis of social-psychology documents was highly demanding.



- ❖ The impossibility to access actors related to this investigation, in order to obtain practical facts.

**e) Recommendations**

**- *In the political realm:***

Many important changes at a national and international level, in the social, economical and political areas gave *chavismo* the domination power it currently has. Therefore, both actors in the conflict should undergo through a process of self-criticism and evaluation of its actions:

- The opposition needs to analyse the shift of paradigm and the main changes the country underwent during the government of Hugo Chávez, take the positive ones (as the empowerment of the population and the acquirement of political consciousness and participation among the civil society) and try to adapt them to their agenda. If the opposition does not analyse these features it will be more difficult for this group to gain the confidence among the constituencies. Its radical opinions with regards to governmental achievements; its open rejection of some treaties of international cooperation with different countries in the region; and its open inclination for United States clash with the current paradigm of the country. Therefore, before emitting public opinions this group should consider first the possible consequences. Furthermore, it should take advantage of its multi-party conformation and give space for leftist groups to address more often to the population. This group should openly expose its agenda and inclinations and show it is not only a group representing entrepreneurs and the right wing but offering an ample alternative.
- The government must understand out of the results of the last electoral process that an important number of people that supported Hugo Chávez voted now in favour of the opposition, which proves that there are groups dissatisfied with the governmental performance or that their electoral decision obeyed their sympathy for Hugo Chávez who won the presidential elections of 2012 with a difference of 2.000.000 votes approximately. As the

central government that concentrates the majority of the power, it has to transparently evaluate its performance and tackle the erosion of the political institutions and find solutions to problems in cooperation with opposition groups; it might be possible that through negotiation, problems such as scarcity of food might be solved in cooperation with the opposition, which concentrates in its lines the interests of entrepreneurs, land owners and investors. The government has to evaluate its performance and how the lack of good governance might hamper its power domination and the continuation of its goals.

- ***In the peace building realm:***

- ❖ If possible, there should be an inter-disciplinary cooperation between academics, civil society, communal councils and other groups on the best way to support political actors to restore the dialogue. Besides the already existing ones, there should be a deeper analysis of the causes and dynamics of the polarisation among the political actors in order to find the best peace building method applicable for establishing negotiations between *chavismo* and opposition; and identifying the most appropriate mediator, taking into consideration the ideological implications the conflict has.
- ❖ Enhance and strengthen the current activities in place for building cultures of peace in order to reinforce the Venezuelan identity beyond political positions taking also into consideration the needs of the people in the grassroots for representation and empowerment, especially reinstating values such as respect and tolerance; also highlighting the importance of institutions such as the family and emphasising the values of life and coexistence.

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