



# DROGAS EN MOVIMIENTO NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS

*Un proyecto de Espolea A.C. [www.drogas-en-movimiento.org](http://www.drogas-en-movimiento.org)*

## **A missed opportunity: Failures of the Agreement between the FARC-EP and the Colombian Government on the solution to the problem of Illicit Drugs**

**By: Juan Ballestas \***

During the dialogues to put an end to the conflict in Colombia 5 points have been agreed to be discussed between the FARC and the National Government in Havana: Land problems, Political participation, Illicit drugs problem, Victims, and End of conflict. Each of these understood as key to achieving a 'last and stable' peace, as it is proposed on the [Framework Agreement](#) that initiated the negotiating talks. Of these five points, there are already [official documents](#) on the first three that reflect what has been achieved in each of them.

It results evident that each one of these collected different realities and problems the country must face in order to achieve peace. However - and without pretending to ignore the importance of other points - the section regarding the 'solution to the problem of illicit drugs' is middlemost, since drug trafficking in Colombia has been instrumental in sustaining what has been the longest conflict in the Western Hemisphere.

The various stages of drug trafficking have been involved in the different moments that violence in Colombia has had. From the simplistic view of Hollywood-style drug cartels of the seventies and eighties, through the financing of insurgent groups, and also by paramilitary violence and landlord elites thanks to cocaine, drug trafficking has been a permanent engine of violence in the country.

That is why between the Colombian and international civil society expectations were high, trusting the agreements would go through a thorough reassessment of the principles and values of the current drug strategy. The dismantling of the political economy of the drug trade, innovation in science and research for industrial and medicinal uses of plants currently declared illegal, and a solid proposal to move from prohibition towards regulatory models, were some of the many ideas and proposals discussed both on formal spaces opened up by the negotiation table - especially the forums organized by the United Nations and the National University of Colombia - as well as [documents, reports and public communications](#) from civil society organizations working on the issue.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. As [noted by the TNI](#), the Agreement published jointly by the delegations at the negotiating table left out inherent problems to the prohibitionist paradigm, as well as other realities of abandonment and isolation proper to certain regions of Colombia where coca plantations are greater. In this context, it is worth questioning about common places and innocuous repetitions that the Agreement proposes. This implies great relevance in order to assess whether a historic opportunity was seized or if, perhaps, some decisions were taken that an eventual signed agreement will impose a future risk for the Colombian people.



# DROGAS EN MOVIMIENTO

NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS

Un proyecto de Espolea A.C. [www.drogas-en-movimiento.org](http://www.drogas-en-movimiento.org)

In the first place, the timelessness of the Agreement should be noted. It seems it was written twenty years ago: oblivious to research and debate in recent years that have shaped the global discussion around drug policy reform. Such blindness leads to omit important discussions that have shown the urgency of a complete paradigm shift in relation to international drug control policy. The deep failures of the policy in terms of negative impacts on human rights and public safety are left out. Also, it ignores the evidence and results from different experiences of regulation and legalization in different countries as well as the benefits of the properties and uses of some medicinal substances.

The Agreement, as currently proposed, it becomes more as a roadmap to break the link between the FARC and profits from drug trafficking, intended to design a national plan to replace illicit crops in their areas of influence, rather than a serious proposal to remove the war economy that drug trafficking represents. As has been pointed out by many experts, the agreement leaves out the various actors and 'links' (of which the guerrillas are just one), besides not proposing a real strategy to bring remote regions out from the historical backwardness in which they have been immersed.

Such is the disconnection that the [Scenarios](#) report elaborated by the Organization of American States (OAS) is not even taken into account - at least is not reflected in the Agreement - and rather than continuing from what has already been built, it proposes to the United Nations to convene a new conference on drugs, without considering that in a few years will be held the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGASS) on drugs in 2016. It does not even tangentially covers the opportunity to advance regulatory models by calling on the need for further studies and greater consensus (among whom, perhaps?).

Although internationally it seems clear that the hegemony of prohibition has come to an end, at the negotiation tables in Havana this reality was put aside, while missing an important opportunity for a true and democratic discussion on the best way to move towards the eminent regulation.

In Colombia, the way this transition will take place will determine the strengthening of the democracy in the country. It would be ridiculous if in Colombia regulation efforts will begin only from a paradigm driven by market forces, leaving out the needs from broader social and farmers sectors that have been historically persecuted by the prohibition. The negotiating table of Havana missed the opportunity to discuss the watermark of a paradigm shift and in summary resigned to the possibility of implementing an exercise of sovereignty to think of a functional strategy for strengthening democracy and human rights, peasant economies and the most marginalized sectors of the country.

\* Philosopher from the National University of Colombia and drug policy and human rights analyst.