

Spain's foreign minister claims Aznar government supported Venezuela coup

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Spanish foreign minister Miguel Angel Moratinos has refused to retract his claims that the former Popular Party (PP) government under the leadership of Jose Maria Aznar supported the coup that temporarily ousted Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias in 2002.

The right-wing PP has denied the claim and called for the resignation of Moratinos. Speaking at a parliamentary hearing on December 1, Moratinos said that his remarks had been misinterpreted and denied that he said that the former government instigated or help prepare the coup.

“What I wanted to say and what I want to say is the Aznar government did not condemn the coup d’ etat, that it endorsed it and gave it international legitimacy,” he said.

He added that “during the last government, the Spanish ambassador received instructions to support the coup, something unknown in Spanish diplomacy, something that will not happen again in the future.”

In April 2002, with the support of the United States, the Venezuelan military briefly ousted Chavez from power. But after widespread protests, Chavez was put back in power.

On a recent visit to Spain Chavez backed the Socialist Party (PSOE) foreign minister’s claim. “ I have no doubt that this is what happened,” he said. “The Spanish ambassador was the only one, together with the US ambassador, who recognised the tyrant—a tyrant put in place via a blood bath, a break with the institutional norm.”

President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has supported his minister and said Moratinos will explain his position to Spain’s lawmakers.

Pedro Carmona, a businessman who was made de facto leader of Venezuela after Chavez was driven from

power is now a fugitive on the run. He visited Madrid a few days before the April 12 coup and met with high-ranking members of Aznar’s administration and members of the Spanish business community.

When the coup had taken place Carmona, who was head of the country’s largest business association, was named interim president. According to the Inter Press Service News Agency, Carmona “phoned Aznar and met with the Spanish ambassador in Caracas at the time, Manuel Viturro de la Torre, who was accompanied to the meeting by the US ambassador Charles Shapiro. While Chavez was being held in a military barracks before being restored to power by his supporters and loyal troops, PP parliamentary spokesman Gustavo de Aristegui published an article in the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* endorsing the coup”.

IPS news then goes on to quote Aristegui: “The popular uprising on Thursday (in Venezuela) opens a door to hope. The new government faces a difficult task: restoring the trust of the people, who are disgusted and disenchanted, and who have the right to peace, democracy and prosperity”.(1)

Moratinos’ comments reflect the PSOE’s shift of its foreign policy away from America and towards closer relations with Europe and strengthening Spain’s long-established ties with Latin America. This is at odds with the PP’s position of supporting America and its colonial intervention in Iraq.

The PSOE’s relations with Washington have been strained since Spain pulled its troops out of Iraq in April this year. As a result close political and economic ties with Venezuela, the world’s fifth largest oil producer, are of strategic importance.

At a state dinner given in honour of Chavez, Zapatero said that Spain would give special attention to the “naval sector” in its relations with Venezuela. Chavez

has expressed an interest in buying one or two oil tankers from Spanish shipyards that are in dire financial trouble. Each tanker would have a capacity to carry 130,000 cubic metres of crude oil and will be ordered by Venezuela's state oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA(PDVSA).

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As part of the same agreement, Venezuela will increase its natural gas and oil concessions given to the Spanish oil giant Repsol-YPF. Repsol is already the largest private business involved in extracting oil and gas in Venezuela.

Businessmen accompanying Chavez met with Repsol executives to discuss creating a company controlled by Repsol and PDVSA to explore new oil and gas possibilities in Venezuela's northwestern region.

Overall, during the visit some 80 Venezuelan and 200 Spanish companies met to discuss bilateral trade and investment possibilities in Venezuela.

Spain's delegation represented a veritable who's who of Spanish business. At the meetings were representatives from Repsol, Cepsa, Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, Dragados, Grupo Santander, Mapfre, Telefonica and Electronor.

To safeguard its investment in Venezuela, the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisation President Jose Maria Cuevas has called upon Chavez to insure legal and political security for foreign investors.

Spain has massive financial interest in Latin America. During Argentina's financial crisis it lent \$34 billion to help bail the economy out. Spain now controls nearly 20 percent of Latin America's banking sector. Its foreign direct investment (FDI) increased from one percent of GDP to ten percent.

Reference:

(1) <http://www.ipsnews.net>, Tito Drago, Business Deals and Like Minded Views. Nov 24, 2004



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