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## **Dispute Within Governing Party Could Jeopardize Paraguayan Elections**

*by LADB Staff*

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Six months in advance of presidential elections scheduled for May 10, 1998 infighting in the governing Asociacion Nacional Republicana (ANR, Partido Colorado) is dominating the political scene and destabilizing the electoral process. Meanwhile, the turmoil has improved the opposition's prospects considerably.

Retired Gen. Lina Oviedo, winner of the Partido Colorado's primary, has been formally disavowed as a candidate by the party's governing body. He is currently facing new investigations for corruption, and he has gone underground to avoid arrest. Meanwhile, another faction of the party has called for a postponement of the elections, setting off a political crisis that transcends the ANR.

On Dec. 1, Oviedo's faction of the ANR (Union Nacional de Colorado Eticos, UNACE) submitted to the electoral court (Tribunal de Justicia Electoral, TJE) Oviedo's application to register officially as the Partido Colorado candidate. The TJE, however, indicated it cannot register Oviedo until it receives authorization from the party directorate. Oviedo's lawyer, Jose Appleyard, had claimed the authorization was not necessary because Oviedo won the primary.

The following day, Domingo Laino y Carlos Filizzola presidential and vice presidential candidates for the opposition Alianza Democratica submitted to the TJE their applications to register as candidates. Meanwhile, Carlos Facetti, the losing candidate in the ANR primary for President Juan Carlos Wasmosy's faction of the party, asked the court to postpone the elections for 60 days.

However, the opposition, as well as the other ANR factions, called a postponement "unconstitutional." They accused Wasmosy of trying to sabotage democracy. "It is very clear to us that there are some people who are interested in thwarting this electoral process, and we think that is extremely serious," said Rafael Filizzola, lawyer for the opposition Partido Encuentro Nacional (PEN). "We categorically reject any measure that breaks the rule of law in our country and undermines democracy."

The petition filed by Facetti called for the internal elections in the Partido Colorado, as well as the opposition Partido Liberal Radical Autentico (PLRA) and PEN primaries, to be annulled because of alleged fraud, and for new party elections to be held. In addition, it asked that the recognition of the Alianza Democratica, made up of the PLRA and the PEN, be revoked, and the registration of Alianza candidates denied. Wasmosy quickly distanced himself from Facetti's actions. "He acted without consultation, and I want to state firmly that this is not a maneuver of mine," said Wasmosy. "I have asked Facetti today to withdraw his petition."

During the political fracas, rumors have circulated of an impending coup or "self-coup," in which Wasmosy would impose extraconstitutional rule. The president, however, has repeatedly said he has no intention of violating constitutional law or prolonging his term in office. He has, however, carried out a purge in the military, replacing Oviedo loyalists with officers who support the president. Feud between president and Oviedo has long history. The confrontation between President Wasmosy and Oviedo reached the breaking point when the general staged an aborted coup attempt in 1996. The government charged the general with "rebellion and sedition."

After preliminary proceedings, Oviedo served a 55-day prison sentence, and was released on Aug. 7, 1996. The proceedings are still underway, and if he is found guilty, he will be stripped of political rights and could not run for office (see NotiSur, 05/03/96 and 08/09/96). Oviedo was elected as the party's candidate in the primary on Sept. 7. However, the party's executive board, controlled by Luis Maria Argana, who also lost in the primary, charged fraud and called for an inquiry (see NotiSur, 09/26/97). Party officials refused to recognize Oviedo's victory and said Colorado members should cast blank votes in May if Oviedo remains the party's candidate.

The conflict erupted anew when, at a news conference in October, Oviedo said Paraguay has been regarded as "the most corrupt country on earth" since Wasmosy took office. In response, Wasmosy ordered the general's arrest on the grounds that the statements were offensive to the dignity of the office of the presidency, the government, and the armed forces. In late October, Wasmosy ordered a raid on Oviedo's house, although the general was not at home at the time. Following that, Oviedo went into hiding.

Oviedo has said he will not be treated fairly if he surrenders, and he has accused the president of plotting to kill him. Oviedo maintains that he is no longer under military jurisdiction since he was retired from the army in April 1996, and if the president feels offended by Oviedo's statements, he should resort to the civil courts. Adding to Oviedo's problems, the media recently accused the former general of smuggling in toxic waste from Germany in 1990 with the help of Paraguay's former ambassador to Bonn, Nicolas "Buby" Luthold. The daily newspaper *Ultima Hora* said a letter written by Oviedo to Luthold at the time confirms the allegation, which first arose during a congressional investigation.

Moreover, the party directorate has petitioned the party's ethics board (Tribunal de Conducta) to expel Oviedo. Party expulsion does not revoke a person's candidacy, according to the Electoral Code. It has given rise to a confusing legal situation, however, which could lead to an election of a president who has been expelled from the party on whose ticket he ran. If he is not allowed to run, the ANR could be without a candidate, since Dec. 5 is the deadline for a party to choose its candidates.

### *Partido Colorado's woes benefit the opposition*

Meanwhile, Alianza Democratica candidate Laino, who is also president of the PLRA, said the internal dispute in the governing party increases the chance that the opposition will win the presidency (see NotiSur, 12/06/96). The crisis "is not an isolated incident, rather it is part of the decline affecting parties in power in several countries after maintaining their hold on power for years," said Laino. "New forces are on the horizon to replace the obsolete political institutions that

can no longer respond to the new period in which we are living, called globalization." [Sources: El Nuevo Herald, 11/03/97; Spanish news service EFE, 10/30/97, 11/02/97, 11/04/97; Clarin (Argentina), 11/04/97; Associated Press, 09/29/97, 10/30/97, 11/18/97; Inter Press Service, 11/07/97, 11/18/97; BBC, 11/20/97; Notimex, 11/06/97, 12/01/97; Reuter, 11/04/97, 11/06/97, 12/01/97, 12/02/97; ABC Color (Paraguay), Noticias Online (Paraguay), 11/24/97, 12/03/97, 12/04/97; Ultima Hora (Paraguay), 12/04/97]

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