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Nicaraguan Government Removes Prohibition Of Foreign Financing Of Political Parties

by Deborah Tyroler

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On April 7, the Nicaraguan government formally presented to the National Assembly a list of proposed reforms to electoral and media legislation. The reforms were pledged by the government at the Feb. 14 Central American summit meeting in El Salvador, with the objective of creating conditions for broad and unfettered participation by political parties and citizens in campaign activities and voting, before and during, the February 1990 elections. The 29 proposed reforms did not include changes in legislation prohibiting political parties from receiving funds that have originated in US congressional appropriations. Some opposition groups considered this restriction unreasonable in light of the penurious state of Nicaraguan society, and the difficulties of mounting a campaign to effectively compete with the ruling party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). On April 13, the Nicaraguan government reportedly reached a compromise with the domestic opposition on this matter. According to Mauricio Diaz, president of the Popular Social Christian Party, the proposed reforms now include an amendment permitting domestic political parties to receive foreign financing from any source under certain conditions. These conditions stipulate that foreign funds are to be registered by and initially deposited in the Nicaraguan Central Bank. In brief, the government has proposed establishing a public disclosure system, under which the funding source, designated party recipient, and amount are available for public scrutiny. Moreover, under this arrangement, the government has access to foreign currency entering the country that otherwise would likely be handled and exchanged in the black market. Next, according to William Robinson, English-language editor for the Agencia Nueva Nicaragua (Washington, DC office), the amendment stipulates that foreign contributions to Nicaraguan political parties are to be shared, i.e., 50% of the monies would go to the designated party, and the remaining 50% would be placed in a "general pool." The general pool is to be used to defray costs of non-partisan electoral activities, e.g., media access for all political candidates, voter registration, and setting up polling stations. Diaz and Robinson were visiting Las Vegas, New Mexico, this weekend as participants in a conflict resolution panel discussion on Nicaragua. The panel was organized by the Trinity Forum (Santa Fe, New Mexico), and the US Peace Institute. [Basic data from CAU.]

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