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Update On Nicaraguan President's European Tour

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General
Published: Friday, April 28, 1989

On April 25 in Brussels during a speech before about 60 Euro-MPs, President Daniel Ortega invited a delegation from the European parliament to monitor the electoral campaign and the February 1990 elections in Nicaragua. Ortega said the observers could meet with any member of the opposition in the country. The Nicaraguan government has also invited observer teams from the United Nations and the Organization of American States to monitor the campaign and the elections. Ortega expressed his desire that "the opinions of impartial observers from the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the European Parliament will prevail during the Nicaraguan elections." In response to questions from the Mps, Ortega said that there were at present 18 active opposition parties in Nicaragua and "tens" of Cuban advisors. Next, he said that any and all opposition parties can participate in the elections, and that all will have access to state-run television and radio. The Nicaraguan leader suggested that "mobile teams" of international observers should travel to all Central American nations to investigate human rights cases and conditions, including prisoners. Asked about political prisoners in his country, he replied that in El Salvador and Guatemala there were no political prisoners because they are systematically killed or disappeared. Ortega acknowledged that there were some cases of human rights abuses in Nicaragua. On US-Nicaraguan relations, Ortega said that President Bush prefers a negotiated solution, but that because of his long-time direct involvement in the Reagan administration's policy it is difficult to distance himself from that earlier policy. Regarding the recent decision by Washington to maintain the contra army in Honduras until February next year, Ortega asserted that the US action "violates international law and the peace accords." Ortega requested European mediation to stimulate dialogue in Central America, and proposed that the region be transformed into a "neutral zone, free of foreign military presence, and where the new weapons systems would be prohibited." The president urged the European Community to support the peace process in Central America with economic aid. He told the Euro-MPs that one way of providing economic assistance would be writing off foreign debts. Ortega met with several senior European Economic Community officials, including European Commission President Jacques Delors, Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens and King Baudouin. Delors told him many EEC member-nations would not raise the amount of aid to Managua. On April 26, President Ortega requested more economic aid from the Spanish government. Unidentified diplomatic sources cited by DPA said that Ortega informed Spanish Premier Felipe Gonzalez about the deteriorating economic situation in Nicaragua. Later, at a press conference, Gonzalez said that in principle his government supported more aid for Nicaragua. However, he said, this issue could be decided only with all European Community member nations at the Stockholm conference on Nicaragua May 11. "If we are able to support Nicaragua's rebuilding programme, then we would be supporting democracy and peace," Gonzalez added. Gonzalez promised that he would support the case of Central American democratization in Washington. The Spanish leader also noted that Nicaragua had implemented "wide-ranging" democratic measures. In 1985, Nicaragua stopped making payments on its estimated $155 million debt to Spain. President Ortega is on a 10-nation European tour. (Basic data from DPA, 04/25/89, 04/26/89; AFP, 04/26/89; Notimex, 04/25/89)