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Chile: Government & Opposition Reach Accord On Constitutional Reforms

by John Neagle

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On May 31, Gen. Augusto Pinochet announced in a speech broadcast on national radio and television that his government and opposition parties had reached an agreement on constitutional reforms. Hours before the speech, Patricio Aylwin, spokesperson for the 17-party opposition coalition, said the parties gave "a green light" to changes drafted by the government to the constitution authored by the military eight years ago. The agreement followed two months of unprecedented negotiations between the military dictatorship, pro-government parties and the opposition coalition. Pinochet is scheduled to step down on March 11, 1990, when the winner of the Dec. 14 election takes over. The general was obligated to call the election after his bid to extend his term until 1997 was rejected by voters in an October 1988 referendum. Aylwin is considered the most likely opposition candidate in the election. Full details of the proposed changes were not immediately disclosed. Pinochet said they include replacing the controversial Article 8 banning marxism with another that "ensures in a better way a responsible political pluralism." The government also agreed to an opposition demand to change the composition of the future Senate by increasing the number of elected senators from 36 to 38, thereby diluting the influence of nine government-appointed senators. Another article opposed by the opposition establishes a military-dominated National Security Council empowered to "represent" its views on key matters to future civilian governments. Pinochet said the clause would be amended but did not elaborate. Earlier, government spokespersons said the regime is prepared to add another civilian member. Next, Pinochet confirmed that the civilian president elected in December will have a four-year term, and cannot be re-elected for a second consecutive term. The general said a clause requiring the approval of two successive congresses to modify certain articles of the constitution will be "suppressed." Instead, approval by two-thirds of the current congress will be sufficient to install the reforms. The government will submit the proposed changes to the four-member military junta, although junta approval is considered certain, as is approval in a subsequent national referendum expected in August. Aylwin said the government did not accept all the reforms sought by the opposition "but there was some clear progress." (Basic data from AP, Notimex, 05/31/89)

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