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Panama: National Legislature Approves Constitutional Amendments

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On Dec. 27, in a 50-9 vote, the national legislature approved 58 constitutional amendments. Next, the amendments must be ratified by the next legislature (following congressional elections), and then presented to voters in a plebiscite four months later. One of the amendments would constitutionally institutionalize a 1990 congressional decision to abolish the army. The decision replaced the Panamanian Defense Forces with a civilian police force called the Fuerza Publica. Other amendments include creation of a human rights attorney general's office; mechanisms to guarantee the independence of the electoral tribunal; expansion of immunity granted to legislators; legislative control of the size of the police force; and, renaming the legislature the "National Assembly."

The seven Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) deputies, and pro-government deputies Leo Gonzalez and Eliseo Alvarez, voted against the amendments. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 12/27/91)

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