

## **The test of the one hundred days: Lenín Moreno, President of Ecuador**

Since last May, Ecuador has a new President Lenín B. Moreno Garcés. This candidacy seemed to be in continuity with the former President, Rafael Correa: Moreno, in fact, has been Vice-president during Correa Administration from 2007 to the 2013. His political “cursus honorum” continued with the election as representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, and then culminated with the presidential candidacy for the elections of the 2017. In this first period of government, Moreno had to face the heavy inheritance left by his predecessor and to avoid the cases of corruption that are crossing Ecuador as, after all, the whole Latin America.

A process initiated clearly during the electoral campaign, but that has suffered a clean acceleration during the first one hundred days of government. The action of Moreno, in fact, has shown immediately the lines of a progressive detachment from his predecessor Correa. It seemed obvious if one considered the decrease of popularity that Correa had showed in the last period of his presidency. Although the former President has maintained high-level of approval (on the numbers are different, according to various polls, but the percentages are superior surely to the 40% of approval), it results clear that the percentage of disapproval (what it is attested around 35%) is increased also.<sup>1</sup> It reveals an evident polarization of the Ecuadorian politics, not too different from what is happening, for instance, in Bolivia.

### **The electoral campaign**

Three aspects have conditioned the presidential electoral campaign. The first one was clear and evident: the opposition to the candidacy of Moreno (seen as in continuity with Correa) was extremely fragmented and it was unclear who would have been the opposite in the run-off elections: the pre-electoral data in fact, oscillated among Guillermo Lasso of the coalition Alianza por el Cambio (alliance among Creando Oportunidades and Movement Sociedad Unida Más Acción) and Cynthia Vitieri of La Unidad (alliance between the Partido Social Cristiano, the Movement Juntos Podemos and others minor political party). It was doubtless that Paco Moncayo, candidate of Izquierda Democrática and of Acuerdo Nacional por el Cambio, would be attested, according to the pre-electoral surveys, to the fourth place. This perception seemed stable despite there was a wide part of the undecided voters (around 45%).<sup>2</sup>

Once opened the ballots, the high-level of uncertainty, obviously, disappeared: the official results, published a week after the election day, revealed that Moreno had almost reached the election in the first turn, while Lasso had been able to hold together good part of the minority. Moreno,

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1 The data coming from the electoral polls elaborated by Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Especializados and those elaborated by Opinión Pública Ecuador. Cfr. C. Vial, «Los 10 años de Rafael Correa en Ecuador: ¿El más exitoso de los Gobiernos Bolivarianos?», in *Emol.com*, 16/02/2017 [available on line at <http://www.emol.com/noticias/Internacional/2017/02/16/845166/Como-fueron-los-10-anos-de-Rafael-Correa-al-poder.html>], last access 24/09/2017]; «Rafael Correa cierra su gestión con una aprobación del 62%», in *El telégrafo*, 17/05/2017 [available on line at <http://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/politiko-2017/49/rafael-correa-cierra-su-gestion-con-una-aprobacion-del-62>], last access 24/09/2017].

2 S. Constante, «La campaña electoral comienza en Ecuador con Lenín Moreno a la cabeza», in *El País*, 3/01/2017 [available on line at [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/02/america/1483397520\\_477922.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/02/america/1483397520_477922.html)], last access 24/09/2017].

in fact, was stopped to the 39,36% of the valid votes, while the other candidate had few more than 28%.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, two different personalities emerged differing by their own past and by their own political culture. Moreno appeared as a politician convinced that the State had to represent the principal engine of the economy, as the ex-President, Correa, has done; at the same time, Moreno, outdistancing from Correa, had revealed a particular propensity to be «more tolerant with the dissent, in comparison with Correa approach, [Correa] government has had a difficulty relationship with the opposition»: these were the assumptions of Santiago Basave, professor of Political Science of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales in Ecuador. Lasso, instead -as a member of the entrepreneurial world of Ecuador- had shown particular propensity toward the best allocation of the public expense, with important reductions but without reducing important expenses as the school, the health and the security.<sup>4</sup>

The electoral campaign (both that of the first turn and that of the second turn) are concluded not without polemics on the formalities and the timing of the publication of the electoral results: while in the first the point of the discussion was the delay in proclaiming the official results, in the second turn the formalities were the issue in debate. As the web newspaper «Deutsche Welle» showed, the web page of the Consejo Nacional Electoral, in the case of the run-off, has crashed during the acquisition of votes. Therefore, the results not have been published gradually but after the counting of the 90% of the ballots.<sup>5</sup> About these data, the doubt of fraud comes from Lasso's words: the final electoral results, Lasso claimed, have been spoiled by irregularity -irregularities reported by his coalition before the proclamation of the definitive official results.<sup>6</sup> Ecuador that emerges from the official data seemed to be a divided Country: Moreno, in fact, picking up few more than 150 thousand valid votes than his opposite, reached the 51,16% of the votes, while Lasso 48,84%. Regarding the results of the elections for the Congress: the Moreno coalition has decreased its own presence passing from 100 seats to 74, while Lasso coalition has reached 34 (gaining 14 seats). The increase of the votes for the opposition, on one hand, throws light on the diminution of popularity of the coalition that has governed the Country for many years and, on the other, it fears the possibility of an *empasse* of the institutional architecture of the State between the executive power and the legislative one. In this last, the majority of government has a very weak consensus in Parliament.

### The first steps of the Moreno Presidency

The political situation after the elections was very complicated: the political world, whose divisions reflected those in Ecuadorian society, was overwhelmed once more because of the corruption scandals that in the last year have involved good part of the Latin American ruling class. For these reasons, Moreno has started a long and difficult process of political pacification, among the various parts of the society. Since the choice of the cabinet government, the new President has shown particular sensibility to the inclusion of political figures coming from enterprises as well as

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3 The electoral legislation of Ecuador establish the run-off election if and only if there is no candidate that has gotten the absolute majority of the votes or the candidate that has gotten the majority overcomes the 40% of the valid votes and there is a gap of 10% of valid votes with the second. For what concerns the electoral results, one can see the table of Consejo Nacional Electoral available on line at [https://app03.cne.gob.ec/EstadisticaCNE/Ambito/Resultados/Resultado\\_Electoral.aspx](https://app03.cne.gob.ec/EstadisticaCNE/Ambito/Resultados/Resultado_Electoral.aspx), last access 24/09/2017.

4 M. Zibell, «Lenín Moreno y Guillermo Lasso: entre dos candidatos presidenciales completamente opuestos, Ecuador decide si continuar o no con el legado de Rafael Correa», in *BBCmundo*, 2/04/2017 [available on line at <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-39455037>, last access 25/09/2017].

5 O. Harms, «Elecciones en Ecuador: la división persiste», in *Deutsche Welle*, 3/04/2017 [available on line at <http://www.dw.com/es/elecciones-en-ecuador-la-división-persiste/a-38277783>, last access 25/09/2017].

6 S. España, «El opositor Guillermo Lasso denuncia el 'manoseo' de votos en Ecuador», in *El País*, 2/04/2017 [available on line at [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/04/03/america/1491183337\\_268756.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/04/03/america/1491183337_268756.html), last access 25/09/2017].

personality coming from the Correa; leader of the Indigenous and environmental movements as well as the representatives of international organizations.<sup>7</sup>

Making the government opened to politician who had not taken part of the Correa Government seemed as an inversion of tendency in comparison to the approach with which Correa had built his Presidency. In other words, it seems that Moreno is trying to gain distance from the long shade of his predecessor. An attempt that not only involves the institutional issues.

For what concerns international relations, in fact, Moreno loosed the sympathies of the so-called «Bolivarian Axis» (composed by Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua) when he has manifested his own particular worry for the Venezuelan political and economic situation. In a speech on television, last August the President of Ecuador has asked the end of the bloody street clashes and riots and, at the same time, he has shown apprehension for «the quantity of the political prisoners». <sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, some days ago the President has asked the respect of the self-determination for Venezuela, refusing the support to external political and military intervention, without the guarantee of both the parts of the dispute. Ecuador during Moreno Presidency seems, in short, to want to maintain an intermediary position among those that have defended the *chavismo* in the past (and, now, Maduro) and those who took the part of the oppositions in Venezuela.

For what concerns economic matters, at first Moreno has criticized the measures promoted by Correa, dismantling the system that had cooked the public budgets: as the «PanAmPost» claimed, in late June «the president Moreno has informed that the public debt of the country amounted to 41.893 million dollars [...], amount that was more than 19.000 million dollars declared by the ex-President Rafael Correa», who had argued that the general deficit was 27.871 million dollars.<sup>9</sup> It was clear immediately that a new public issuance was necessary: the total amount of this was 2.000 million dollars. The declared target was and remains to reduce drastically the primary deficit that currently is more than 7% annual, to make it 2% in the 2021. Threshold the increase of the public debt means to reorganize the Ecuadorian economy.

In particular way, introducing the 2017 budget, Moreno has pointed out five political measures that have been already designed: to reconsider to make more dynamics the income taxes; to stimulate the investments with an *ad hoc* law for the re-entry of the capitals from the foreign countries; to promote the use of the electronic payments; to make more austere the management of the public economy. On this last point, the government has announced the necessity to optimize the public investment, without cutting, at this moment, the education, the health, the social expenses and the defence.<sup>10</sup>

For what concerns political issues, Moreno has tried to limit the crisis connected to the scandals of corruption that in the last times have occupied the front page of every national newspaper. Frankly, the corruption seems to have pervaded completely Latin American politics: in particular, the investigations on the scandal of the Brazilian enterprise Odebrecht has shown a deep

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7 For brief biographical notes on the ministers, one can see: «¿Quiénes son los integrantes del Gabinete de Lenín Moreno», in *El Comercio*, 23/05/2017 [available on line at <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/ecuador-miembros-gabineteminsterial-leninmoreno-gobierno.html>, last access 26/07/2017].

8 «Giro de Ecuador: Moreno cuestionó al chavismo», in *La Nación*, 16/08/2017 [available on line at <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/2053510-giro-de-ecuador-moreno-cuestiono-al-chavismo>, last access 25/09/2017].

9 M.A. Camacho, «Situación económica de Ecuador 'es crítica', aseguró presidente Lenín Moreno», in *PanAmPost*, 29/07/2017 [available on line at <https://es.panampost.com/miguel-camacho/2017/07/29/situacion-economica-de-ecuador/>, last access 25/09/2017].

10 M. Orozco and S. Angulo, «Lenín Moreno dice que situación económica del país es crítica», in *El Comercio*, 28/07/2017 [available on line at <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/leninmoreno-acciones-presupuesto-economia-ecuador.html>, last access 25/09/2017].

network of corruption in Latin America ruling class - corruption that crosses the national borders and the political tendencies.<sup>11</sup>

In this network, Jorge Glas who had accompanied in the presidential ticket Moreno, as Vice-presidency, is fallen: devotee of Correa, Glas would have required an illegitimate financing to the 2014 electoral campaign to Odebrecht, according to the investigations still in progress:<sup>12</sup> this investigation, that is also using the collaboration of the Spanish and Brazilian justice, has moving the first steps in 2016 and is beginning to give the first judicial results and, therefore, political.

The dispossession of the powers of the vice-president, announced by Moreno last 3 August, is the most flagrant (political and judicial) result. The President has dismiss Glas, estranging him from Assembly, as, for example, the Consejo Sectorial de Producción or the Consejo Consultivo with the enterprises. It was only the conclusive action of «unborn love» between the two highest offices of the State: the exclusion of Glas, however, must be read, above all, as another fracture between Moreno and its predecessor, Correa.<sup>13</sup> A fracture, fortified by the Parliament, where unanimously has been voted the motion that binds the Vice-president Glas to the investigations for the Odebrecht case in Ecuador. This vote however has left some open injury that appear incurable at this moment: three exponents of Moreno Government closest to Correa, in fact, have decided to resign from their own government charges. They are Ricardo Patiño, ex political adviser of the presidency, Paola Pabón, the ex-National Secretary de Gestión Política, and Virgilio Hernández, former adviser of the Presidency for the housing and environmental politics.<sup>14</sup>

The contrast between Moreno and Correa, now seems incurable. Only a few weeks ago, in fact, the first one has reported the presence of a hidden camera in the presidential office, installed by his predecessor. An obscure story: the video camera, according to the words of the actual President, «had turned on, but the cables that connected it to the hard disk [...] were disconnected».<sup>15</sup> A story that shows how much the Country cannot abandon the Manichean rhetorical of opposition between good and evil that has characterized the years of the Presidencies of Rafael Correa.

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11 A. Jiménez Barca, «Qué es el 'caso Odebrecht' y cómo afecta a cada país de América Latina», in *El País*, 9/02/2017 [available on line at [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/02/08/actualidad/1486547703\\_321746.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/02/08/actualidad/1486547703_321746.html), last access 26/09/2017].

12 «Delator de Odebrecht asegura que Jorge Glas le pidió \$1 millón para campaña», in *El Universo*, 27/09/2017 [available on line at <http://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/09/27/nota/6403540/delator-odebrecht-asegura-que-jorge-glas-le-pidio-1-millon-campana>, last access 29/09/2017].

13 M. Zibeli, «Lenín Moreno vs Jorge Glas: Ecuador en su propio 'Juego de Tronos' entre presidente, vicepresidente y expresidente», in *BBCmundo*, 4/08/2017 [available on line at <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40822587>, last access 26/09/2017].

14 S. España, «La trama de corrupción de Odebrecht involucra al vicepresidente de Ecuador», in *El País*, 22/08/2017 [available on line at [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/08/22/america/1503423678\\_838596.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/08/22/america/1503423678_838596.html), last access 26/09/2017].

15 G. Lissardy, «Presidente de Ecuador, Lenín Moreno, sobre Rafael Correa: 'A algunos expresidentes se les olvida que dejaron de serlo'» in *BBCmundo*, 22/09/2017 [available on line at <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-41356807>, last access 26/07/2017].