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Chávez after Chávez: Is Venezuela Shifting to Radical Socialism?

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Summary

Remarkable economic growth, vast energy resources, the originality of the Bolivarian revolution and the President's eccentric style have all contributed to make Venezuela a strategically important country and a widely debated case study.

Following his landslide victory in the elections on December 3, 2006, Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez made a few announcements that seem to indicate his wish to accelerate and radicalise his country's path towards socialism.

It is still unclear to what extent he will put into practice these ideas, some of which might be just propaganda. Nonetheless, the radicalism of his recent announcements, which affect a wide range of policy areas, do represent a change with the line followed by the President in his previous terms, and the proposed measures are likely to have important political and economic consequences, both in domestic affairs and foreign policy.

In the last few years, Venezuela has increasingly made the headlines and has been widely studied and analysed. This is essentially due to two reasons. The first one is strictly political and has to do with the President's ideology: though varying and scarcely defined, the so-called Chavism is an original mix of socialist, nationalist and populist elements which has become more and more influential throughout Latin America. It has raised both hopes, among the region's poors, and deep concerns, expressed by the business sectors at home as well as in the US and Europe; but it cannot be denied that Chavismo has made its way to the top of the political agenda, and has had an impact on many of the elections which took place last year¹, which were often seen

as competitions between a pro-US (market friendly) option and a Chavista one². The second reason why Venezuela has become so strategically important is that the country is currently ranked sixth in the world for proven oil reserves (and ninth for proven gas reserves)³; furthermore, it is the United States' fourth largest oil supplier. It is evident that, in a world where energy issues are becoming increasingly central factors in international

<http://www.voceditalia.it/index.asp?T=naz&R=est&ART=3624>.

² Probably the clearest and most radical example was Ecuador: during the second round of Presidential elections, on November 26th, electors had to choose between a neoliberal magnate, Alvaro Noboa, and a Chávez ally, Rafael Correa (who eventually won). But the "Chávez factor" was also present in other elections: in Bolivia and Nicaragua the Venezuelan President's influence helped the candidates sympathetic with his ideas (Evo Morales and Daniel Ortega respectively), whereas in Peru his interference was in the end counterproductive and damaged his political protégé (Ollanta Humala).

³ Source: BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy* 2006.

¹ Eleven presidential elections took place in Latin America between November 2005 and December 2006. For an overview on these elections see I. BIGIO, *Latino América ante el 2007*, in <http://www.bigio.org/nota.asp?ID=Noticia=3316> or A. BOZZINI, *Bilancio di un anno elettorale*, in

relations, Venezuela has increased its leverage on the world stage, and its economy boomed⁴. Chávez is taking advantage of this situation both at the domestic level, designing ambitious social plans funded by the abundant oil revenues, and in his foreign policy, using the “energy tool” as a means to increase his regional influence, to establish ties with non-Latin American countries (such as Iran) and to fight what he calls “American imperialism”. Remarkable economic growth, vast energy resources, the originality of the Bolivarian revolution⁵ and the President’s eccentric style have all contributed to make Chávez’s Venezuela a strategically important country as well as a widely debated case study.

The elections of December 3 2006

The Presidential elections in Venezuela concluded a long series of Latin American elections in 2006; it was a symbolic conclusion since, as stated above, Venezuela has become a major regional player. The whole world was watching this electoral process, not least because some expected Chávez, if not to lose the elections outright, to at least have a modest result. On the contrary, not only did the President win, but he finished with a convincing 63%, largely above the result he had on the occasion of the 2004

referendum⁶. This clearly shows that his popularity has not decreased with his years in power, quite the contrary: he enjoys a level of support that few leaders can claim to have. Another important element of the December electoral process was the regularity of the vote: the day of the elections was quiet, with virtually no violence and a high turnout both in poor and richer neighbourhoods. The preliminary statement issued by the Election Observation Mission of the European Union, while mentioning some minor drawbacks, clearly underlined “the peaceful nature and general acceptance of results”⁷. There was virtually no fraud, as many in the opposition feared, and the fact that the defeated candidate, Manuel Rosales, immediately conceded victory to Chávez seems to exclude the presence of such irregularities as to affect the result.

If the vote was substantially regular and if the turnout was high, it means that Chávez’s victory proves that he is a quite popular leader. As a consequence, he is not a sort of dictator who made his way to power through violent or illegal means, as he is sometimes said to be. What is more, since he came to power in 1998, the President has won all the elections he has faced, including legislative, local and presidential elections as well as a recall referendum. Even though in

⁶ On August 15th 2004 the opposition, on the basis of a constitutional provision, managed to secure a recall referendum to remove the President from power; the NO vote won by 59%. See http://www.cne.gov.ve/referendum_presidencial2004.

⁷ Issued in Caracas on 5 December 2006. See <http://www.eueom-venezuela.org>.

1992, when he was still just an army colonel, he organised a coup (which eventually failed) and was thus imprisoned, today he is a leader who has democratically won all the elections he competed in.

On the other hand, the 2006 vote chronicled another important element: the birth of a united and strong opposition. Manuel Rosales was able to unify, under his leadership, a heterogeneous group of parties, which for a long time had been riven by internal fighting, and win no less than 36% of the vote. A strong opposition can be crucial to balance the President’s tendencies to authoritarianism, if it remains united, plays by the democratic rules (abandoning the temptations which led to the short-lived coup in 2002) and definitely abandons the short-sighted strategy of boycotting elections, as it did in 2005, whose only result was that the Assembly is now entirely in the hands of Chavistas.

The President has interpreted his victory on December 3rd as a renewed legitimacy, a stronger popular mandate to deepen his revolution. He now feels stronger than ever, firmly believes that most people are behind him and back his socialist project. Therefore, taking advantage of the momentum, in the weeks following the elections he announced measures which, if put into practice, would remodel Venezuela’s political and economic structure, leading the country to what he himself named “XXI Century Socialism”.

Domestic policy prospects

Days before the inauguration of his new presidential term on January 10th 2007, Chávez an-

⁴ The real GDP grew by more than 10% in 2006.

⁵ Named after Simón Bolívar, an independence leader of the XIX century who tried to unify Latin America and to fight the US influence in the region.

nounced that the “transitional period”, i.e. his first two terms in office (1998-2006), was over and that the time had come for Venezuela to move faster towards socialism: a new era had begun. This acceleration, according to the President, should be put into practice through a series of legislative, political and economic measures.

Probably the most important of the announced initiatives are some constitutional changes. First of all, Chávez plans to remove the existing cap to presidential re-elections, which the Bolivarian Constitution he himself sponsored sets at two terms⁸; achieving this would allow the head of state to remain in office indefinitely. A second project would be to change article 302 of the Constitution, according to which the state reserves to itself the petroleum industry, in order to include all the hydrocarbons. Chávez also wants to revoke article 303, which allows private sector engagement in the operation of state-owned oil company PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela). Yet another proposed change would eliminate the Central Bank’s autonomy, though it is still not clear how and to which extent.

In order to speed up the decision-making process, the President had announced that he would ask the Assembly to give him the power to rule by decree; the proposal, known as Ley Habilitante (Enabling law) was quickly discussed

⁸ It is commonly said that Mr Chávez started his third term after the 2006 elections; however, he was firstly elected in 1998, before the approval of the new Constitution, therefore this is his second term under the rules of the Bolivarian Constitution.

and was already approved on 1 February by the Parliament, as the Chamber is monopolised by Chavistas. Therefore, Chávez now has the possibility to legislate directly, with no need of Parliament’s approval, for 18 months in 11 strategic areas, including economy, finance, energy, security and defence. This was a key measure to authorise the President to put into practice, without delays, the plans he has in mind, including the most controversial ones, which some MPs might have been hesitant to vote for.

Another important move which would increase the President’s control over his allies is the proposal to unify all the parties currently composing the ruling coalition into a single party, the Socialist Party of Venezuela, whose major shareholder would be Chávez’s Movimiento Quinta República (MVR). Though some of the groups of the alliance are reluctant, especially the most moderate ones such as Podemos and Patria Para Todos, most parties are likely to support this initiative. With the same aim of ensuring even closer control of his coalition, the President carried out a cabinet reshuffle; those Ministers promoted, as well as the new appointments, have been noted for their closeness to the President (including his own brother, Adán, who has been appointed Minister of Education) or represent a shift from moderate alliance partners to radical ones⁹.

Among the announcements that have been made in the last few weeks, perhaps the one

⁹ A good example of this is the replacement of vice-President José Vicente Rangel with Jorge Rodríguez.

that has raised most concerns, especially at the international level, is the plan to re-nationalise the strategic business that had been privatised in the nineties, following the principles of the Washington consensus. These economic sectors include telecommunications, media and electricity, as well as oil and gas.

Chávez stated that the country’s main telecoms company, Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (CANTV), whose shareholders include US-based Verizon and Spain’s Telefónica, should return to state hands; at the same time he announced that the broadcasting licence of Radio Caracas TV (RCTV), which supported the 2002 coup attempt against the President, will not be renewed. Another candidate for nationalisation seems to be Venezuela’s largest electricity company, Electricidad de Caracas, owned by the US company AES since 2000.

The plan to re-nationalise significant areas of the economy obviously includes the most strategic sector: energy. Particularly sensitive is the situation of the refineries which upgrade the heavy oil from the Orinoco belt: these are operated by joint ventures in which PDVSA participates with multinational companies such as the US-based ChevronTexaco, ConocoPhillips and Exxon Mobil, as well as France’s Total, British Petroleum and Norway’s Statoil. These joint ventures are likely to be renegotiated to give the state-owned company a majority stake (probably 60% by May 2007), as it was done last year with the contracts for traditional oil operations, though some fear that they could be nationalised directly. Despite the fact that

the Minister of Finance publicly stated that nationalisation of these strategic sectors will be carried out according to the law, which requires that shareholders receive a fair price, the question of compensations is far from being settled.

Other announcements made by Chávez with a view to build the “XXI Century Socialism” include changes in the military and the powers of local authorities. As for the former, a new “mission”¹⁰ will increase the identification of the army with the revolutionary process, not least renaming it the “Bolivarian Armed Forces of Venezuela”; this initiative follows previous steps taken by the Chávez government with regard to the military: the purchase of weapons and helicopters from Russian companies and the creation of a military reserve composed of civilians. Regarding local authorities, the President may decide to curb the powers of state governors and mayors, while giving new impetus to the councils of “communal power”: self-governing entities first introduced in April 2006 with the aim to develop a model of direct democracy.

It should be borne in mind, however, that in 2007 the

¹⁰ Bolivarian missions are a series of social programmes implemented by the Chávez administration; these include initiatives in the fields of health, education, poverty reduction, food and housing. Perhaps the most popular (and successful) one is Barrio Adentro (inside the neighbourhood) which provides free health care in poor areas of the country, mainly thanks to the service and expertise of hundreds of Cuban doctors, deployed by the Castro government in exchange for subsidised oil.

price of oil is expected to decrease considerably, compared to peaks of over \$78 per barrel last summer, and as a consequence the growth of Venezuelan economy, though still strong, is expected to decline from just over 10% in 2006 to a more modest 5.5% in 2007. This will obviously have a serious impact on the government’s social programmes, and in particular on the *misiones*, which are funded by the oil revenues and whose sustainability in the presence of a price fall is doubtful. The country’s economy will also be damaged by the trends of domestic and international private investments, which are expected to decrease as a result of the radical measures announced.

Foreign policy prospects

Hugo Chávez is an ambitious leader who has decided to carry out an aggressive foreign policy and try to achieve a leading role on the international scene. Thanks to abundant oil revenues, he has been able to build a network of economic and political relations, obtaining goods, expertise or just political support in exchange for subsidised oil. He has tried to influence several electoral campaigns in neighbouring countries, helping candidates sympathetic with his ideas, and has dared to challenge the Bush administration. The objectives of Chávez’s foreign policy are to defend the “revolution” and spread its message, promote Venezuelan leadership in Latin America and the developing world, oppose globalisation and neoliberal policies, and in general work towards the emergence of a multipolar world in which Venezuela

may reduce its dependence on the US. The means through which Chávez has been implementing his strategy are, again, the revenues coming from the country’s extensive energy assets, but also his own widespread popularity, which does not seem to be decreasing either at home or abroad. This determined and aggressive foreign policy is likely to remain substantially unchanged during the President’s new term, as we foresee continuity more than radical changes.

Chávez is particularly active at the regional level. He has been supporting Chavista candidates in several elections, in some cases successfully (Morales in Bolivia, Ortega in Nicaragua, Correa in Ecuador), though not always (his ally Humala lost in Peru). In 2007 there are only two elections scheduled in Latin America (Argentina and Guatemala), so the Venezuelan leader will be much less busy trying to interfere with other countries’ electoral processes. On the other hand, he now has more regional allies, as Ecuador might decide to join the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA, in Spanish)¹¹, promoted by the axis La Habana-Caracas-La Paz, while Nicaragua has just joined; Caracas also plans to sign energy agreements with these new sympathetic governments. Chávez’s regional leadership could therefore be

¹¹ ALBA is a project of cooperation among Latin American and Caribbean countries, promoted by Venezuela and Cuba in opposition to the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas. Chávez and Castro signed the preliminary agreement on 14 December 2004; Bolivia joined on 29 April 2006 while Nicaragua did so on 11 January 2007.

come more effective, though on the other hand his defeat in the competition for the UN Security Council non-permanent seat¹² denied him the possibility to have a prestigious world stage to publicise his messages. Regarding other regional organisations, in 2006 Venezuela left the Andean Community (CAN)¹³, blaming Colombia and Peru for signing Free Trade Agreements with the US, and joined Mercosur (Southern Common Market)¹⁴, a politically and economically stronger bloc. But now the situation has changed for several reasons: Bolivarian ideas have not been successful within Mercosur, where Brazil's President Lula and Argentina's Kirchner might become increasingly irritated by Chávez's desire for protagonism; Colombia and Peru seem to soften their differences with Caracas, while Ecuador has become an ally; and Venezuela would reportedly lose 1,170 million dollars in export to CAN members and has already lost its position as second trade partner to Colombia¹⁵. For these reasons, it

¹² Venezuela was competing with Guatemala for the second Latin American seat; none of the two countries was able to reach the required majority, but Venezuela gathered less support than its opponent in nearly all the 47 voting rounds held. Finally, Panama was chosen as a compromise candidate.

¹³ The Andean Community is a bloc created in 1969 which currently comprises Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. See <http://www.comunidadandina.org>.

¹⁴ Mercosur originated in 1991 and now includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. See <http://www.mercosur.int>.

¹⁵ According to Moisés Bittan, former president of the Venezue-

cannot be ruled out that Chávez will eventually decide to re-join the Andean bloc¹⁶.

The US are concerned by Venezuela's "dangerous relations" with countries such as Iran, China, Russia and of course Cuba (whose *líder máximo* inspired many of Chávez's policies and ideas), as well as with guerrilla movements like Colombia's FARC. The heart of the problem is the Bolivarian President's desire to reduce his country's economic dependence on the US, which still represents half of Venezuela's foreign trade and is the top buyer of its oil¹⁷. Right after the December 3rd elections, the scenario appeared favourable for a shift to less confrontational US-Venezuela relations: Bush seemed forced to soften his position due to the fact that the Democrats had taken control of Congress, the State Department was thought to assume that its aggressive anti-Chavista policies had not paid off, while Chávez himself could decide to soften his anti-US rhetoric after the Democrats' victory and after he lost his bid for a UN Security Council seat. However, the announcements made by the Venezuelan President in the last few weeks have changed the situation: the new impetus

lan-Colombian Chamber, quoted in R. SAHMKOW, *Retorno a la CAN: viveza o arrepentimiento* in <http://www.talcualdigital.com>.

¹⁶ The CAN itself, though, seems to be in difficulties and might eventually disintegrate, either because further members leave to join Mercosur or because the two blocs merge to form the South American Community of Nations (CSN), a project already under way.

¹⁷ On the other hand, Venezuela is the United States' fourth oil supplier.

on nationalisations, in many cases targeted at businesses controlled by American companies (CANTV, Electricidad de Caracas, oil joint-ventures), and the increasing authoritarian attitude of the President, who is centralising more and more power into his hands, have irritated the Bush administration. Therefore in the next few months US-Venezuela relations are likely to continue to be extremely tense; things might change significantly only in case of a Democrat becoming President in 2008.

Relations with the European Union, though generally good, have never been a priority for Chávez, given the fact that the EU is a modest trading partner for Venezuela (some 10% of total trade); however, in his desire to diversify its commercial ties, in the coming years he might give more importance to some European countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal. Caracas will also maintain its good relations with Iran (Chávez seems interested in developing a nuclear power programme), Russia (which provides Venezuela with military equipment, following the US ban on arms sales) and particularly with China, a potential export market of great importance (though unlikely to supplant the US as the country's main trade partner and importer of energy).

Where is Venezuela going?

The key questions which all analysts are trying to give an answer to are the following: why did Chávez decide to radicalise his revolution now? To which extent will he put into practice the announce-

ments made in the last few weeks? Who or what could stop him? Towards what kind of political model is Venezuela evolving?

The President has been deepening his self-defined Bolivarian revolution since he came to power; but such a radical shift was not expected, because it is much more than just an evolution from the previous years. The reason behind this change is probably the large victory that Chávez had in the December 2006 election. Many thought (or hoped) that his popularity was declining, but the vote clearly showed that this was not the case; therefore he wants to take advantage of the momentum and implement radical reforms, knowing that the vast majority of the population is ready to follow him. At present, more than ever before, Chávez feels that people have given him a mission to change the country; he feels powerful and therefore thinks that it is the right moment to take a step forward. A second reason behind this shift is the regional scenario: in the weeks preceding the Venezuelan elections, two Chavista key allies came to power, Correa in Ecuador and Ortega in Nicaragua, thus strengthening the role of Caracas at the regional level; at the same time Lula, who was also facing elections, abandoned his sometimes critical position towards Chávez¹⁸ and appeared to have reached a pact with him for mutual support. A third reason could be the escalation in the last few years

¹⁸ For an excellent overview of Latin America's different "Lefts", including the divergences between Chávez and Lula, see J. CASTAÑEDA, *Latin America's Left Turn*, in «Foreign Affairs», May/June 2006.

of the price of oil on the world market, which has progressively reduced Venezuela's vulnerability to sanctions, capital flight and declining foreign direct investment.

Other possible explanations of the radicalisation are less convincing. Some argue that the President decided to take an authoritarian turn in order to undermine the resurgent opposition, which had managed to unify its various components and obtain a positive result with Manuel Rosales as candidate; but this is not plausible on the one hand because a strengthening of the opposition might have instead led the President to soften his differences with it, and on the other hand because soon after the election the anti-Chavista coalition began to split again. Another explanation which is not particularly convincing is that Chávez felt stronger and freer due to the US President's weakened position; but the Venezuelan leader seems to care little about Washington, and to consider the "devil" Bush more as a rhetoric means to rally his supporters than as a real threat or constraint to his strategy.

Another element that must be assessed in order to foresee Venezuela's future is whether its President will actually put into practice what he has been announcing since he was re-elected. We have learnt that Hugo Chávez is a man who should be judged for what he does and not for what he says; flamboyant rhetoric is part of his charisma. But in this case the impression is that he will follow up on what he has proclaimed. For the first time since he came to power in 1998, he has the means to implement all the reforms he has in mind: he has just re-shaped

the government by shifting several ministers, is backed by the entire Parliament since the opposition did not participate in the elections in December 2005, has a strong influence on the judiciary and other institutions¹⁹, and have been given a strong popular mandate in an election internationally recognised as substantially fair and democratic. To introduce those constitutional changes, Chávez needs to win two-thirds of the Assembly's approval and a referendum; both of which should be easy to achieve given that he is unanimously supported by the Parliament and has just demonstrated how easily he can win an electoral challenge. It is likely that he might decide to rule out some of his plans for strategic reasons, in order to avoid a radicalisation of the internal opposition or of international partners²⁰, but it is also just as likely that he might put into practice most of the announcements he has made, starting with the rule on indefinite presidential re-election. The promptness with which the Ley Habilitante was approved seems to confirm this.

For the time being, only two scenarios could potentially stop Chávez, or at least force him to moderate his strategy. The first one is internal and could arise if he "goes too far". In fact should the President concentrate too much power in his hands, giving

¹⁹ Four out of five members of the National Electoral Council (CNE) are considered Chavistas, and so are the Ombudsman, the Attorney general and most members of the Supreme Court.

²⁰ For example he might decide to find a compromise and mutually satisfactory solution with foreign oil companies in the Orinoco belt.

birth to an authoritarian single-party regime, a schism might occur within the Chavista movement, producing a parliamentary opposition; some signs that this could happen have already appeared, in the form of opposition to the idea of a unified party. At the same time, if the President decides to considerably limit private property, this would not only deepen the rift in an already divided country, but could also lead to a decrease in the number of citizens who support him, since most electors voted for Chávez (for his charisma, his humble origins, his social programmes) more than for a socialist project. Several surveys²¹ carried out in the last few years confirm that Venezuelans are relatively attached to democracy and enjoy living in a democratic system; therefore they would probably not allow Chávez to go too far. A second scenario that might slow down the President and his revolution is external and could emerge if Caracas finds itself isolated in the regional context: should Morales fall, Ortega get closer to the US and Correa follow a different path, and should Lula and Kirchner decide to jointly solicit him to change some of his policies, Chávez may have little choice but to act more moderate. However, it would take a number of years for any of these scenarios to materialise, therefore in the forthcoming months no serious obstacles can be foreseen, and as a result the Bolivarian leader is neither likely to moderate his strategy, nor to slow down his revolutionary path. Other scenarios, like a US-supported coup d'état, seem to be myths

²¹ See for example *Informe Latinobarómetro 2006*, in <http://www.latinobarometro.org>.

and propaganda more than probable developments.

The last issue that needs to be tackled is towards what kind of model is the Chavista Venezuela evolving or, in other words, what the “XXI Century Socialism” is²². It must be noted that there is no clear definition of it and that Chávez himself probably does not have an exact idea of what it is. It is not a coherent model, supported by an ideology and expressed through concrete measures; rather, it seems to follow the leader’s changing strategy and political sensitivity. Also, it is very doubtful whether the Bolivarian revolution can be exported or emulated in other countries: to a significant extent, it depends on the charisma and popularity of its inventor and requires huge oil revenues to fund the social programmes as well as the ambitious foreign policy. It would be almost impossible to implement such a “revolution” in a country where the leader has a weaker personality and does not possess vast resources to finance his policies and, by this means, build consensus in key constituencies.

There are also several notable differences with the Cuban model, which many fear could be the final stage of Chávez’s Bolivarian process: in fact in Venezuela the power of the President (though strong) still

²² D. PIGNOTTI, *El socialismo según Chávez*, in <http://www.pagina12.com.ar>; A. ALEMÁN AGUIRRE, *¿Nuevo socialismo?*, in <http://www.laprensa.com.ni>; F. BARRIOS NIEVES, *Socialismo siglo XXI o capitalismo de estado chavista*, in <http://www.analitica.com>; J. ALTAMIRA, *La vía venezolana al socialismo*, in <http://www.telesurty.net>; R. ZIBECHI, *Images of socialism*, in <http://alainet.org>.

has many checks, opposition parties are legal and were even able to achieve a good result in the last elections, the Constitution allows the organisation of a referendum to remove the President and the media enjoys a certain degree of freedom²³. There is no doubt that the President’s authoritarianism will increase, not only through a tougher grip on society thanks to the reforms quoted above, but also through symbolic measures²⁴, however it is unlikely to lead to dictatorship. According to some observers, this is a post-modern regime, neither fully democratic nor fully totalitarian, but enjoying a level of legitimacy never reached in most autocracies²⁵. In fact, Chávez likes being photographed with “his friend” Fidel Castro and boasting the strategic alliance between the two countries, with the clear intention of being identified with the successor of the Cuban revolutionary icon; it is also true that Fidel inspired or suggested many Chavista poli-

²³ According to the Reporters Without Borders’ 2005 annual report, Venezuela is ranked 115 out of 168 countries in terms of freedom of the press, better than Colombia (131st), Mexico (132nd) and of course Cuba (165th). A good example of the freedom still enjoyed by the Venezuelan media is that *Tal Cual*, a newspaper edited by the well-known social-democrat opponent Teodoro Petkoff, is able to issue front pages like the one on 1st February 2007, featuring a picture of Hitler under the headline “Heil, Hugo”. See <http://www.talcualdigital.com>.

²⁴ Like the recent decision to celebrate with a military parade the 15th anniversary of the failed coup led by colonel Chávez on 4 February 1992.

²⁵ F. FUKUYAMA, *History’s Against Him*, in «The Washington Post», August 6, 2006.

cies and initiatives²⁶. However, it is evident that Venezuela is still very different from Cuba and that, for the above-mentioned reasons, it is unlikely that the “XXI Century Socialism” will become a replica of the Castrist model. More probably, it will evolve according to Chávez’s changing mood and political strategy, mixing classic socialism, nationalist measures and populism. What is out of doubt is that Venezuela, due to the increasing role of energy resources and to the activism of its President, will remain for the next few years a country which will continue to make the headlines and have a significant influence on its neighbours. Equally important and influential will remain Hugo Chávez, whose original revolutionary path is destined to be admired by some, feared by others, but carefully analysed by all; knowing that he is a man of his own, impossible to classify according to traditional political models, and so is his idea of a “XXI Century Socialism”.

²⁶ It seems that the *misiones* themselves, now the core of Chávez’s policies, were suggested by Castro.

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