The legacy of the Stroessner regime in Paraguay

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About a month ago, the head of the Paraguayan Senate said “we had democracy before 1989 when the Colorado Party was strong” and “At that time the party ruled the country”. A few weeks later, on 3 November, the anniversary of Stroessner’s birth, Horacio Cartes, the current president of Paraguay said in Ciudad Del Este (which used to be called Puerto Presidente Stroessner) that this date was a ‘fecha feliz’ (a happy date, or a happy anniversary). These were codes for the nostalgia which is still quite prevalent in Paraguay with regard to the Stroessner dictatorship. It is interesting that this feeling of nostalgia for the dictatorship that ended 26 years ago have surfaced even more in recent years.

Birthday celebrations still take place in one of the barrios of Asunción, with fireworks on that night – expression of the nostalgia for autocracy that you find in many parts of the world. One of the phrases that is often used to support this nostalgia is that there was no crime in Paraguay under Stroessner, a view that is repeated over and over again. It is not simply said that there was less crime but that “there was no crime” in Paraguay during the dictatorship. Counterbalance that with the view of civil rights activists who remind us of the gross human rights violations during the same period. Indeed there were no motochorros – thieves who go round the urban areas of on motorbikes and steal handbags and cellphones. In fact, there is a simple answer to that because until 1989 there were very few motorbikes in Paraguay and hardly anybody had a mobile phone. So this crime-free idyll is a rather questionable assumption. On the contrary, recent research show that there were at least 18,000 homicides reported in the press during the Stroessner dictatorship.

These polarised views on criminality show how the period of stronismo remains one of great controversy in the country. Interestingly the standard history of Paraguay that’s selling most at the moment, a publication by Santillana, a Spanish publishing house, includes a chapter on the Stroessner regime. All the other chapters were written by Paraguayans but the one on the Stroessner regime was written by a foreigner and it is interesting as to why they asked a foreigner, myself, to write it. And the reason is that it was too controversial for anyone inside the country to write it - even six years ago – because it would be criticised from on or the other side depending on what stance they adopted.

The objective of my talk this evening is not in any way to analyse the Stroessner regime. I have written extensively on that subject. Instead, I want to get beyond these rather simplistic slogans that are bandied about and instead to examine the legacy of the regime, and not an evaluation of the regime itself. But before I do that, and by way of background, I think it is important to say a few words about the regime itself but not in any great detail. In doing so I want to emphasise some of its features that I think give a pointer as to why its legacy has been so significant in Paraguay. First, there is the length of the regime. Stroessner ruled the country for over 34 years from 1954 to 1989, the longest ruler in Paraguayan history and the longest ruler in Latin American history. He was also the third longest ruler in the world during the post-1945 period, after Kim Il Sung in North Korea and
Zhukov in Bulgaria. So we are talking about an autocratic regime that had been in power for a very long time. And of course, even in a purely superficial sense, the longer the period of office, the stronger you would expect the legacy to be. Second, the regime was structured along a tripartite relationship between the armed forces, the Colorado Party and the government of the day. This was embodied in the persona of Stroessner himself, around whom a sort of personality cult developed even though he wasn’t a very charismatic individual. But note that this regime predated the bureaucratic-authoritarian military regimes in other parts of the Southern Cone. His was a different kind of regime. It was not that kind of regime that brought together the military and technocrats in Argentina, Brazil and Chile in order to transform, as they saw it, the economic structure. This was a very different political animal. And unlike those regimes, Stroessner did not ban all political parties. On the contrary he allied himself very closely with the Colorado Party - one of the two traditional parties that had originated as far back as the 1880s. In fact the Colorado Party, as I hope to show, was an essential component of the Stroessner regime. This was not a classic military regime by any means.

There has been a lot of work done recently on trying to understand the typology of the Stroessner regime, notably by Marcial Riquelme and Neil Howcroft. The general consensus is that it is what Max Weber called a ‘sultanic’ regime. I want to emphasise here, in understanding the legacy of the regime is that there was no clear rupture such as we witnessed in other parts of the Southern Cone and Latin America. The overthrow of the regime in February 1989 was not, contrary to what many people would have us believe, the result of some kind of popular uprising by civil society. It was a putsch. I am not being pedantic here but a putsch is when one military group replaces another military group and a coup is when the military overthrows and civilian government. And this was a putsch carried out by his co-cuñado - because Stroessner’s son was married to the daughter of Army General Rodríguez, who carried out the putsch to replace Stroessner. Another indication that it was not a very clear rupture was the fact that within 24 hours Rodríguez put him on a plane to Brazil where he remained in exile for the rest of his life. The background to this putsch included external pressure – this was the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. There was a lot of pressure from the United States at that time to “democratise” Latin America, including Paraguay, along the lines of the prevalent thinking in the State Department – the idea that the ‘transition to democracy’ should emphasise, above anything else, the holding of elections, as if in some way, holding elections will magically deepen democracy and produce a vibrant civil society and improve overall governance in countries around the world. We know now that that was a rather naïve assumption. To recapitulate, this review of the background to the overthrow of Stroessner highlights two important features – the very long time-period of the regime and the absence of a clear rupture.

Bearing in mind these two facts I now want to examine three major and interrelated features of the legacy of the Stroessner regime. In all cases they derive from the long nature of the regime and the lack of a clear rupture. They are, first, the repressive nature of the regime, second, the co-existence of a strong party and a weak state, and third, the international dimension, namely the changing geopolitical relationship, in particular the forging of a very strong relationship with Brazil. In each case I want to show the relevance of the longevity of the regime and the lack of a clear rupture.

First, let us look at the repressive nature of the regime. I am not going to examine the violation of human rights. What I want to emphasise tonight is that the repressive strategy of the Stroessner
regime was rather different to that of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. It was a strategy that I have called ‘preventive repression’. It was first enunciated publicly in 1972 by General Gerardo Johanssen at an Interamerican Defence Board meeting in Montevideo. Basically, what this strategy involved was that at the slightest perceived threat – and I say ‘perceived’ because often the threat was non-existent, made up, or in people’s minds – the state should respond with overwhelming force. This approach characterised the nature of repression in Paraguay. So there was an enormous imbalance between the actual threat to the regime and its response. This response was mainly carried out by the police and only on few occasions by the armed forces.

The final report of the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) published in 2008 said that 20,000 arbitrary arrests were recorded during the Stroessner period, but that 94% of those who came to testify said that they had been tortured. This fits in very clearly with this strategy of preventive repression – arrest people, torture them and release them and you spread fear among the population. On the other side of the coin, by comparison with the other repressive regimes of the Southern Cone at the time, only 60 extra-judicial executions and 336 disappeared were reported to the TJC. These are relatively small numbers, on a per capita basis, by comparison with comparable figures for Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. These figures reveal the particular nature of the repressive regime in Paraguay and the legacy that it has left.

As part of this strategy the regime closely monitored the activities of groups that it thought were dissidents. In particular, I would emphasise the way in which the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were monitored. To put it bluntly, there were hardly any NGOs allowed to exist or tolerated during most of this period. In fact embryonic NGOs only existed to the extent that they operated under the umbrella of the Catholic Church and the support of some of its sectors. I would like to share a couple of anecdotes about this. The first relates to what happened in the little community of Fram to the north of Encarnación in 1955, less than a year after Stroessner took power. Fram was an agricultural colony populated mainly by anti-communist Ukrainians and Russians who had come to Paraguay fleeing from Stalin. In early 1955 they held a community celebration to which they invited the local police chief from Encarnación. And because they spoke Russian, they sang the Russian national anthem in a spontaneous manner. News of this was transmitted back by the police to Asunción and within 24 hours all adult males over 16 in the colony, about 300, were arrested. The ‘ringleaders’ were taken to Encarnación, were they were beaten and tortured, and a dozen of them were taken to Asunción. I am recounting this event because it was almost totally unknown inside Asunción until 2005 (six years after the removal of Stroessner) when one of the sons of those arrested back in 1955 wrote a book about it. And everybody was shocked. I mention this incident because it shows just how culturally isolated large parts of Paraguay were during the dictatorship and that events of this kind could pass virtually unnoticed, not just in the outside world but inside Paraguay itself. And here is a second anecdote to emphasise the cultural isolation during the stronismo, itself partly explained by a highly controlled and very traditional education system. It refers to a letter sent by the Paraguayan Ambassador to the UK here in London to the Observer newspaper and published on 8 April 1977, complaining about a report in the paper that was critical of the Stroessner regime. I won’t read the whole letter but I want to focus on something that the Ambassador says in the letter, as follows: “The population of Paraguay is not predominantly Indian. Of an estimated 1.5 m people only 30,000 are true Indians. Paraguay is proud to be the only bilingual country in Latin America but the official language is Spanish and is spoken by the entire population without exception. It is not true that Guarani is habitually spoken in our
Parliament. We are not backward but underdeveloped.” Why am I mentioning this? Because in 1977 at least 45% of the population was monolingual in Guaraní. Only 5% were monolingual in Spanish and the rest were bilingual. And yet the Ambassador could write to a newspaper in Europe with an outrageous statement, saying that everybody spoke Spanish. Even today – nearly 40 years later - around 15-20% of the population are monolingual in Guaraní. I mention this anecdote only because it highlights how the extreme cultural isolation of Paraguay enabled spokespersons of the regime to make totally false statements about what was happening inside the country and get away with it precisely because there was a dearth of information about the country in the rest of the world.

The opposition to the Stroessner regime was not very strong. There has been much written about the ‘peasant league’ movement and I know something about that because the heartland of the movement was in a part of the country that I know best, where I have relatives and neighbours who are descendants of people who suffered greatly during that period of repression. The movement was supported by the Catholic Church and influenced by the so-called “theology of liberation”. But the fact remains that this was a very small movement that was stamped out very easily by the regime and when most of the survivors were released from prison what was most depressing was that many of them were ostracised by people in their own communities because of fear and ignorance.

No senior official of ministerial level in the Stroessner regime was ever brought to trial for human rights violations. There was one minister – Sabino Augusto Montanarío, the Minister of Defence – who, terminally ill, returned voluntarily from exile in Guatemala in 2009 but he died before his trial began. This was very different from what happened in other countries in the Southern Cone, where senior officials were indeed brought to trial. I mention these rather disparate facts because what they have in common is that they tell us something about the weakness of civil society during this period of extreme repression. Consequently, after 1989 it remained weak, albeit growing slightly in strength, for many decades. So this first major consequence of the repressive regime has been, by comparison with many parts of Latin America, a weak civil society. That is why it is so surprising and exciting to see what has been happening in the past few months in Paraguay with the sudden emergence of a strong student movement protesting about corruption inside Paraguay’s main public university. So this is first major consequence of the Stroessner regime – the legacy of a weak civil society that derived from this particularly sophisticated strategy of ‘preventive repression’ carried out by the regime.

The second feature of the regime that I want to discuss is the “strong party – weak state” nature of the Stroessner regime. The regime attached itself to one of the two traditional parties in the country – the Colorado Party. In so doing, it transformed that party into a highly efficient vertical structure operating at the grassroots level through a network of party branches, seccionales, of which there were round 200 and today nearly 400. They penetrate right down to the village level in rural areas and to the neighbourhood level in urban areas and even have a primary level, known as ‘sub-seccionales’. This vertical party apparatus, operated like a system of chain links from the very top, through which the leading party body, the Junta de Gobierno, imposed ‘party lists’ of candidates for political office throughout the country right down to the village level. Compliance with directions from the top was paramount. In doing so, the party was able to co-opt a significant proportion of the population through these mechanisms of clientelism, by providing an incipient social service in exchange for party support, and also by using the activists of the party branches as a way of
monitoring the activities of perceived dissidents at the local level. Hence the strategy of preventive repression did not simply rely on paid informers from the Ministry of the Interior (known as pyragues) but also on the mechanisms embodied in the party apparatus itself. For example, in exchange for reporting on an unusual meeting that my neighbour had in our village, through this clientelistic relationship, I could hope to derive some particular benefit now or in the future by keeping on the good side of my local party boss, e.g. if my child becomes ill, or if I needed to make an emergency visit to an ill relative in Argentina, or if I needed money for a coffin for a deceased member of my family.

The other side of the coin to this transformation of the party by the regime was a very weak system of public administration, even by comparison to the rest of Latin America at the time. Meritocratic initiatives that appear in other countries in the region, such as the creation of National Institutes of Public Administration, designed for the training of staff and the introduction of proper staff selection methods, hardly existed in Paraguay. Instead, the public administration was riddled with rampant clientelism and nepotism, with very few meritocratic features and a culture of spiralling corruption, particularly at the ministerial and senior director level, but also penetrating through the party apparatus because the ministries were filled almost exclusively with party members. In order to become an official in the armed forces, from 1955 – one year after Stroessner took power - it became obligatory for cadets in the army school to join the party.

So these deeply embedded party-state links became a major feature of the regime and they remained so for many decades after Stroessner was removed from office. What is particularly interesting is that the virus of these nepotistic-clientelistic relationships have been transferred to newly created bodies since 1989. In line with the ‘democratisation’ paradigm and the emphasis on ‘good governance’ and ‘electoral integrity’, a Controller Generals Office, an Ombudsman Office and an Electoral Commission were created - three bodies that are intrinsic to the establishment of good governance. Created under pressure from the international donor community and with the best of intentions, they have been penetrated by the virus of this deeply embedded culture of clientelism and nepotism, itself a reflection of the strong party/weak state syndrome that was a feature and legacy of the regime.

I want to emphasise two enduring consequences of the strong party – weak state relationship and the corruption and mismanagement that it produced inside the state. The first consequence was the tolerance of smuggling by the armed forces of a range of goods, switching from mainly cigarettes and whisky in the early years of the regime to narcotics and arms in the final years after 1989. What is important is that the institutional mechanisms for this trade were put in place during the regime at the highest level. For example, it is widely believed that General Andrés Rodríguez, who led the overthrow of Stroessner, was himself involved in narcotics smuggling and money-laundering. One strong indication of this was that for many years he was not allowed entry to the US but in 1988, six months before the putsch, the US government reversed its position, granting him immunity from prosecution. He was then able to forge strong relations with the US thereafter. When once questioned by a foreign journalist, Stroessner himself referred to the smuggling trade as el precio de la paz (the price of peace), a tacit acknowledgement that leading members of the armed forces and civilian ministers were involved in these illicit activities. This was one way of maintaining some kind of balance inside the regime. We can trace the consequences of these mechanisms for regime consolidation and preservation to the present day. We now find a situation whereby the region of
the country where it became most strongly embedded - the city in the far east that used to be called Puerto Presidente Stroessner and that was changed to Ciudad Del Este in 1989 - is where today much of this illicit activity is concentrated. It has flourished and diversified over the past 25 years and has spread northwards to other towns such as Pedro Juan Caballero, Capitan Bado and Salto Del Guairá. In these areas there is now increasing domination of day-to-day life by narcopolitica. Local elections were held in mid-November 2015 and in that part of the country several narcopoliticians have been elected. Indeed the current president of Paraguay, Horacio Cartes, is himself under strong international suspicion for his involvement in many of these illicit activities, going back to the mid-1980s when he disappeared from view for four years after a scandal in the Central Bank associated with manipulation of the multiple exchange rate system then in force. To this day nobody knows where he was during these ‘hidden years’. There is a four year gap in his CV. It is known that when he surfaced shortly after the overthrow of Stroessner, he had amassed a considerable fortune that he then invested in banking and the purchase of companies and cattle ranches. He also became involved in manufacturing cigarettes in Brazil, as well as increasingly in Colombia and the Caribbean. Today he is probably the richest man in Paraguay. I am not suggesting that the Stroessner regime is wholly responsible for the terrible scourge of narcopolitics in contemporary Paraguay but rather that the institutional mechanisms that enabled it to flourish were put in place during the stronato. The rampant corruption, especially at the local level, between judges, lawyers, local politicians, and local police – the nexus, the caldo de cultivo, for the emergence of these kinds of illicit activities - was set down in the early days by the regime, so flourishing during and after the stronismo itself.

The second consequence of this ‘strong-party- weak state model is the limited rule of law. I have already mentioned state corruption in general but it was particularly bad in the judiciary. This is probably one of the most nefarious consequences of the Stroessner regime which Paraguayans are still facing today. During the stronismo, there was no pretence of an independent judiciary and the Supreme Court judges were all formally party members. They went round with the red party handkerchief round their neck and openly attended party meetings. They were all appointed directly by the president, quite legally according to the prevailing legislation, for five year terms that were co-terminus with that of the president. And he could of course then replace them if he wanted. This has been a terrible consequence of the Stroessner regime that even now has not been resolved. There have been repeated attempts to reform the judiciary. But given this embedded clientelistic relationship between party and state, the whole debate about removing one judge and replacing with another is seen exclusively in terms of ‘political balance’ between the ruling Colorado Party and opposition parties. The way that this debate is framed is a tacit acceptance of the ongoing understanding that judges should be politically identified. Five or six impressive palacios de justicia (palaces of justice) have been constructed around the country in order to deconcentrate the judicial system. But what goes on inside those palacios is very little different to what went on 20 years ago. They are still a haven of corruption, thanks to the nexus between judges, lawyers and local police. This is something that is extremely difficult to reform because these mechanisms of mutual support are very resilient. As a result, it is not an exaggeration to say that today the rule of law does not exist for most poor Paraguayans living in rural areas.

Let me move on now to the final legacy of the Stroessner regime and here we turn to international affairs, namely the greatly strengthened relationship with Brazil that took place under the Stroessner regime. Historians tell us quite rightly that until the 1940, of the two big players in Paraguay,
Argentina was the most powerful inside the Paraguayan state. There was a pendulum policy under which successive governments sought to play off the two regional superpowers to the benefit of little Paraguay. But during the 1940s under the Morínigo regime, a rapprochement began with Brazil. In 1943 Stroessner went to study in the Brazilian army school in Rio de Janeiro. When he came to power in 1954 there was a noticeable shift in foreign policy towards Brazil and the key factor here was the construction of the hydroelectric plant at Itaipú on the border between Paraguay and Brazil, which was the largest hydro plant in the world until the Three Gorges plant in China came on stream a few years ago.

Fundamental for generating the energy at Itaipú was control of the largest waterfalls in the world, the Guairá Falls, 170 kms upriver from Itaipú and to which Paraguay laid claim for nearly a century. But the Brazilian military occupied the disputed territory around the falls in June 1965 and on 21 October of that year they expelled the deputy foreign minister of Paraguay from the area. The Stroessner regime made a mild diplomatic protest but within less than a year a secret agreement, the Act of Iguazú, was signed on 22 June 1966 between the two military governments. This effectively ‘drowned’ the frontier dispute and the Itaipú treaty itself was signed in 1973, opening the door to the construction of the Itaipú hydro dam and the submerging of the Guairá Falls themselves.

The terms of the Itaipú Treaty are regarded by many analysts as grossly inimical to the interests of Paraguay and they argue that Brazil has been by far the major beneficiary of the project. The key terms of the treaty were as follows. The energy produced was shared 50-50 between the two countries but any surplus energy not consumed in either country has to be sold to the other country. Of course, little Paraguay consumed no more than 5% of its half share and was obliged to sell the remainder to Brazil. And the sale price was way below the comparative price for international energy sales. On top of that the terms of the treaty could not be renegotiated until the treaty itself expired – not in 10, not in 20, not in 30, not in 40, but in 50 years – i.e. 2023. In other words, Paraguay had its hands completely tied by the terms of the treaty but it is widely believed that leading members of the Paraguayan elite were paid off in order to accept an extremely imbalanced relationship over the project, which is still of great strategic importance to Brazil. Even now, 17% of all energy consumed in Brazil comes from Itaipú. That is a very large share for a country the size of Brazil.

So what was going on here? In the weeks following the withdrawal of troops and prior to the signing of the Act of Iguazú, the Paraguayan government removed a law that banned foreigners from purchasing land within 150 kms of the national frontier. Such is a law in place in many countries, including Brazil itself. This facilitated the influx of Brazilian commercial farmers to buy land in Paraguay. They were able to do so thanks to a distorted ‘land reform’ process that the Stroessner regime had instigated in the east of the country, where there remained enormous tracts of publicly-owned virgin forest. Some of this land was given over to landless farmers from the more congested area around Asunción who were encouraged to migrate and settle as colonists in the far east of the country. However, we now know that at least 40 per cent of this land was actually sold to elite members of the regime who had no legal right to purchase under the regime’s own land reform legislation. The land was supposed to sold only to small farmers, there was an upper limit of 50 hectares on the individual plots, and the land could not be resold. In fact many military generals and high-ranking civilian members of the regime obtained amounts in excess of 5,000 hectares. The most recent study of the scandal revealed that in the east of the country 1.5 million hectares of state land
were distributed during and after the *stronismo*, of which 43 per cent went to people not entitled to the programme. Many of them later resold their spuriously obtained land to Brazilian farmers moving westward across the border from neighbouring states of Brazil.

That process has created another important legacy of the Stroessner regime, namely the growing penetration of the country by *brasiguayos*, the sons and daughters of these migrants, who collectively now account for 95 per cent of the soybean produced in Paraguay, which is now the fourth largest exporter of soybean in the world. The extreme dominance of this major exporter earner by foreign nationals, belonging to a community that is not deeply integrated into Paraguayan society, is potentially a time-bomb. If a conflict arises over renegotiation of the Itaipú Treaty, and Paraguay takes the matter to the International Court of Justice, then it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Brazil may regard this community as providing a *cordon sanitaire* for protection of its geopolitical interests, namely the strategically important source of hydroelectricity from Itaipú.

I would like to point out some consequences of this changed relationship with Brazil, one of which is the failure to industrialise during and after the Stroessner regime. This has a certain logic to it because the purchase of a maximum part of Paraguay’s 50 percent energy share at a very cheap price is something that the Brazilian authorities, through the state energy company Eletrobras, were very keen to maintain. So Brazil had little interest in Paraguayan industrialization because, in doing so, the country would absorb a higher proportion of its own energy share, and so have less surplus energy to export to Brazil. It is only in the very recent past that high-tension electricity transmission cables have been built to link Itaipú with Asunción, which could encourage greater industrialisation around the capital city.

Another indication of the imbalanced relationship with Brazil is that, during the construction of what was at the time one of the largest public works projects in the entire world, no cement was manufactured in Paraguay for the Itaipú hydro dam. No steel was produced. Small cement and steel works were set up but not for provisioning Itaipú. Instead, the totality came from Brazil. To some extent that is understandable because Brazil was and is a much larger country than Paraguay. However there was no attempt at all to use the opportunity created by Itaipú in order to industrialise the country in any significant sense.

With regard to the unequal legacy of the treaty, it is noteworthy that in 2012 the government of President Franco commissioned Jeffrey Sachs, a prestigious economist at Columbia University, to do a study of the Itaipú Treaty. He concluded that Paraguay had long ago paid off its debt to Itaipú Binacional, because of the very low sale price of its energy to Brazil. But what happened? Sachs presented his report to the current president of Paraguay, Horacio Cartes, who said that he thought that Sachs did not understand the Itaipú project properly and went on to shelve the report. As a result it did not influence public policy to the energy sector.

This changed relationship with Brazil is very worrying indeed. There is a real danger that, although Paraguay has a very nationalistic culture because of the tragic wars that it has fought against neighbouring countries, Paraguay is being converted gradually into a ‘protectorate’ of Brazil. Of course, Paraguay retains a seat in the United Nations as an independent country. But the power of Brazil inside Paraguay is now so great - and here we have not even looked at what is happening in other sectors such as rice and meat production – and the relationship has become so extremely
unbalanced, such that the ‘pendulum policy’ of playing off its two large neighbours to its own benefit – such as Nepal does with India and China, for example – seems to have been abandoned.

In conclusion, I want just to recapitulate some of the salient points of my talk. First, the legacy of the Stroessner regime in Paraguay has been extremely strong and it is only now, after more than 25 years, that some of the negative aspects of that regime are seriously being addressed. An example is the student movement, calling for reform of the gross levels of nepotism and corruption at the highest level of the national university. The Rector of the Universidad Nacional de Asunción, created in the 1880s, is currently in jail on charges of scandalous corruption, charges that relate to practices that have been going on for several decades and that are only now being addressed. Second, the reason why that legacy has been so strong is partly because of the absence of a clear rupture in 1989 but also because of the legacy of the highly controlled and restricted education system that has changed very little in rural areas over the past 25 years and that has meant a very weak civil society capable of challenging these embedded structures. Third, the ‘strong party-weak state’ structure is still immensely strong. The Colorado Party is relatively-speaking probably the strongest political party in Latin America today. The ability of the party to bring in an ‘outsider’ - Horacio Cartes - and win a presidential election in 2013 was simply because of the first small glitch in the party’s domination of the country since 1947. In 2008, a former Catholic bishop, Fernando Lugo, had won the presidency but the only reason why this happened, and this should be re-emphasised, was because of a very rare split inside the party. If that split had not occurred the Colorados would have won in 2008 as they always had before. Lugo was removed from office in 2012 thanks to a lightening impeachment, which we do not have time to examine now. The simple point that I want to make is that the Colorado Party is still immensely powerful as a political machine in Paraguay. On 15 November 2015 local government elections took place in Paraguay. The Colorados lost in several municipalities, notably in Asunción and Encarnación. However the number of municipalities controlled by the party increased by ten, bringing the total to 148 out of the 250 municipalities in the country. But most noteworthy of all, 48% of the national share of the vote went to the Colorado Party. It remains a powerful and non-programmatic party, deeply conservative, ridden with clientelism but an effective ‘machine’ with no discernible internal pressures to reform. The growing strength of civil society to challenge those deeply embedded structures is impressive. However, the legacy of the Stroessner regime has been so strong that it will take time to overcome them.

Thank you.

and then maybe dispense with him in the near future