

The political discourse of Comunes regarding FARC-EP dissidents in Colombia

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Abstract: The following paper aims to explore the political discourse of the party heir to the FARC-EP, now known as Comunes, in relation to the phenomenon of dissident groups that see themselves as continuing the legacy of the defunct guerrilla, and which have proliferated after the signing of the Peace Agreement in late 2016. Based on nine in-depth interviews with political figures who have occupied or occupy relevant positions in the current political party, we explore the issues that enable us to understand how this phenomenon has taken place. The aim is to give a voice both to the official party line and to the critical sector, which have formed a kind of political divide since January 2021. Both sides have a shared understanding of the structural and institutional aspects that have led to the emergence of these armed groups, although they differ on other aspects, in particular, regarding their position towards the armed group led by alias ‘Gentil Duarte’ and, above all, the group known as ‘Segunda Marquetalia’. Since August 2019, the latter group of dissidents has been led by alias ‘Iván Márquez’, previously the head of the FARC-EP’s negotiating delegation during the peace process.

Key words: Peace Agreement, Comunes, political discourse, dissidents, FARC-EP

1. Introduction

This paper aims to address the political discourse of the current political party heir of the extinct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) in relation to the different armed structures and breakaway groups (known as FARC-EP dissidents) formed after the signing of the Peace Agreement between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and said guerrilla in November 2016. More than six years after the signing, the proliferation of different armed structures that somehow consider themselves successors of the FARC-EP (Ríos, 2021) is endangering the current peace-building process (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2020).

Some FARC dissident groups, such as the one led by the former commander of the FARC-EP's Eastern Bloc, 'Gentil Duarte'¹, were formed before the signing of the Peace Agreement and therefore see themselves as the only true continuation of the former guerrilla group. Others, like the group of FARC dissidents known as 'Segunda Marquetalia', are headed by leaders of the peace process that took place in Havana between 2012 and 2016, such as 'Iván Márquez' or 'Jesús Santrich'. As a result, in August 2019, this armed group was created, and (self-)legitimized as an outcome of non-compliance with the Peace Agreement. Finally, from mid-2016 to the beginning of 2019, a myriad of structures also emerged, which, based on a marked local heritage, have continued to claim some kind of continuity – more fictitious than real – with the supposed revolutionary legacy of the FARC-EP. This is because they are rather small local organizations, continuing the armed activity of a FARC-EP front or column, but mostly led by rank-and-file or mid-level guerrilla commanders – even militia members. The majority of them, far from being (re)mobilized by violence, are new recruits, aiming to control drug production and commercialization links, illegal mining or other illicit activities – something that can be extended to the most important dissident groups – often leaving the political discourse relegated to the background (Ríos, 2022).

It is no coincidence that most of these organizations have flourished in areas where illicit crops and, to a lesser extent, gold mining and other sources of illegal financing are found. (Rettberg *et al.*, 2018; Ríos *et al.*, 2019). Nor can we ignore the territorial dimension of a situation that has barely transformed the conditions that support the violence. Thus, institutional weakness or lack of socioeconomic opportunities are aspects to consider, especially in regions such as eastern Colombia, the Pacific coast, or in the southern departments of the country (Aguilera and Perea, 2020).

In relation to the above, this research attempts to answer the following question(s): How do those who hold or have held positions of responsibility in the political party inherited from the guerrillas define and perceive the scope of the new FARC-EP dissident groups? Who is responsible for them? Are there differences between them? The overall objective, therefore, is to analyze the political discourse generated by FARC-EP's political party, Comunes, in relation to the scope and significance of these dissident groups. To do so,

¹ Prominent leaders of 'Segunda Marquetalia', such as 'Jesús Santrich'. 'Romaña' and 'El Paisa', were killed in unknown circumstances in confrontations with other armed groups, especially with the 'Gentil Duarte' guerrilla, in 2021. In identical circumstances, still to be clarified, 'Gentil Duarte' was killed in May 2022.

this paper has been organized into five distinct parts. First, we present the methodology for this work, followed by an exhaustive review of the literature on peace research and conflict resolution focused on identifying the factors that lead to the formation of breakaway organizations in the aftermath of a peace agreement. In the discussion of the literature, the factors that influence the transition from arms to the ballot box are also addressed. However, before focusing on the specific aspect of the FARC-EP dissidents, given the particularity of the object of study, we present the most important aspects of the content of the Peace Agreement signed with the guerrillas in 2016. Notably, its complex implementation during the presidency of Iván Duque (2018-2022) is highlighted. We then describe how the most relevant FARC-EP dissident groups were created, how they spread and how they have evolved. Finally (before presenting the conclusions that serve as a corollary), we discuss the accounts of nine prominent political figures from the now defunct FARC-EP who occupied positions of relevance in the political transition of the guerrilla organization between 2016 and 2021.

It should be noted that this political transition had been foreseen in the Peace Agreement, and specifically in the second (“Political Participation”) and third (“End of the Conflict”) points, where the core aspects of the party that should be the political successor of the guerrilla were included. Accordingly, rules of financing, legal status, institutional representation and political visibility were established therein, and the party’s formal creation, on September 1, 2017, was a significant milestone. This took place in a context of intense internal confrontation between the majority sector led by ‘Iván Márquez’ and the sector led by Rodrigo Londoño, formerly known as ‘Timochenko’. After an internal consultation, which was won by ‘Iván Márquez’, the acronym FARC and a Marxist-Leninist-Bolivarian ideology known as the “April thesis” were adopted.

These two aspects would serve to undermine the party’s political and electoral performance in the 2018 legislative elections, where they would obtain little more than 50,000 votes, which were nearly halved in the 2022 legislative elections. Thus, plunged into an identity crisis, and facing a major confrontation between its two main leaders – ‘Iván Márquez’ and Rodrigo Londoño – the party tried to recover, especially once the former returned to armed activities. This facilitated the gradual transformation of the party and the renewal of some of its ideological principles and party programs, culminating in a change of name to Comunes in January 2021. This led to a new internal crisis, in which some senators such as ‘Victoria Sandino’ and ‘Benkos Biohó’ were removed from the

party and a new national leadership was formed, aligned with Rodrigo Londoño, including, among others, 'Sandra Ramírez', 'Pablo Catatumbo' and 'Rafael Malagón'.

It should be noted that a work such as the one presented in these pages has an added value as academic research for several reasons. On the one hand, it enables the testimonies of actors directly involved in the implementation of the Peace Agreement to be collected and analyzed. Actors, who beyond appearances in the media, have not yet been academically analyzed in terms of how they interpret, question or substantiate a phenomenon such as the one surrounding the dissident groups. Moreover, according to Booth (2005), we are dealing with an actor whose relationship with the security phenomenon has tended to be silenced by the prevailing structures, but which has been brought to the forefront through the disciplinary approach proposed in critical security studies.

It is also an attractive subject because of the complexity involved in former comrades continuing or returning to violence and in the fact that structures that have nothing to do with the FARC-EP are laying claim to its name and its "revolutionary legacy". This fact gains even greater importance due to the quest for nuances and positions from a group of prominent voices of the former guerrilla who, precisely at the time of being interviewed, at the beginning of 2021, were undergoing a process of partisan fragmentation, between the supporters of 'Timochenko' and his detractors.

Also, in disciplinary terms, this work is closer to critical security studies in that it recognizes the importance of the subjective dimension and the inexorable assumption that no world exists separated from the constructions that actors and observers make of it. It also claims an interpretative method that prioritizes the perception and interaction of the interviewed ex-combatant population and the phenomenon of the new dissident groups that have emerged since 2016. Finally, this work puts the attainment of contextual understanding and eminently practical knowledge before determinate, transhistorical and generalizable predictions (Krause and Williams, 1996).

In other words, the way in which the emergence of the different FARC-EP dissident groups after the signing of the Peace Agreement has been perceived is central to these pages. Thus, the relationship between security and threat, between legitimization and condemnation, is resolved by delving into the attitudes and individual positions of an important community of former guerrilla leaders that epistemologically vindicates the

case study and demands an ongoing relationship between social reality and theory. This approach has much to do with discursive construction and the transcending of a theoretical knowledge that is as contradictory as it is ideologically non-neutral in its terms.

Finally, the content of this paper should be understood as an opportunity to extract analytical lessons from a phenomenon that the new government of Gustavo Petro will have to face in its particular peace-building project. This is because of the expressed need to address and offer solutions to the complex and polysemic phenomenon of the dissident FARC-EP groups – apart from formal negotiation with other groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN). All in all, this work is an instrument of political reflection, with a strong ethnographic component, with which to enrich the approaches that today are called upon to play a central role in Colombia's public and political debate.

2. Methodological aspects

Given the necessity to define the FARC-EP dissidents in terms of their origins, evolution or interactions, we must first outline the distinctive aspects of the group led by 'Gentil Duarte', the 'Segunda Marquetalia' dissidents, and all the residual groups that have claimed some kind of connection with the FARC-EP. To this end, we have carried out an in-depth review of the research that, to date, has best explained the emergence of these groups and the role they play in the geography of violence in Colombia (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021; Indepaz, 2018, 2020, 2020b; Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, 2019, 2020). These reports have also been complemented by other sources, both formal (Special Jurisdiction for Peace, 2021) and academic (Aguilera and Perea, 2020; Ríos, 2021).

The most analytical component of this study draws on the stories and narratives of those who were once part of the FARC-EP and who, at present, approach and interpret the phenomenon surrounding the formation of dissident groups in their own particular way. For this purpose, a total of nine in-depth interviews were conducted, based on criteria of plurality, representativeness and saturation of profiles with a clear political influence in the former guerrilla movement. Among those interviewed are four of the five senators that Comunes obtained for the 2018-22 period in the Congress of the Republic, such as Griselda Lobo ('Sandra Ramírez'), Jorge Torres ('Pablo Catatumbo'), Israel Zúñiga ('Benkos Biohó') and Judith Simanca ('Victoria Sandino'). Likewise, there are also

testimonies from the House of Representatives, both from former congressman Benedicto González ('Alirio Córdoba') and from Ansisas García ('Pedro Baracutao'), head of the list for the department of Antioquia for the 2022-2026 term. There are also those who stand out for their relevance, both during the time of the guerrilla and following its political transition. Such is the case of Ubaldo Enrique Zúñiga ('Pablo Atrato'), former president of Ecomún, Tanja Nijmeijer ('Alejandra Nariño'), FARC-EP negotiator in Havana, or Germán Moreno ('Rafael Malagón'), also former manager of Ecomún and member of the National Directorate of Comunes.

Among the many different opinions expressed, there are those who represent the official discourse prevailing in Comunes ('Sandra Ramírez', 'Pablo Catatumbo', 'Rafael Malagón', 'Pedro Baracutao'), as well as the critical members who have left or have been removed from the party's leadership positions – by openly confronting or dissociating themselves from the party's leadership – such as 'Benkos Biohó', 'Victoria Sandino', 'Pablo Atrato', Tania Nijmeijer or Benedicto González. That is, while the objective is to analyze the understanding of the dissident group phenomenon and how it is treated among those who are or were leaders of Comunes, gathering the testimony of those who are currently in the National Directorate of the party, and also of those who have left, can offer some interesting nuances and distinctions. This decision in terms of methodology prioritizes the analysis of the political elites of the now defunct guerrilla, while the strictly local dimension and the narratives coming from those who really chose to assume the continuity or the return of violence have not been considered. This aspect may be addressed in subsequent studies.

This component of heterogeneity allows us to consider as a hypothesis the overall rejection of the so-called "dissidence phenomenon" (here in quotation marks) insofar as all of the interviewees have differentiated the group led by 'Gentil Duarte' or the 'Segunda Marquetalia' group from the rest of new armed structures, which they label as criminal gangs that lack any political motivation. As will be seen, a shared discourse exists that can be extended to other aspects, such as the causes that explain how these groups originated or the threats they pose to the Peace Agreement. In the same way, it would appear that, in part, the discursive nuances on how the problem of FARC-EP dissidents is perceived is related to the way in which the implementation process itself was developed, especially between 2017 and 2018; an aspect intimately related to the

times and transformations involved in the transition from violence to peace building (Shesterinina, 2022).

However, there are also important differences. In particular, the political leadership of the former FARC-EP distance themselves indiscriminately from all other groups that claim some kind of continuity with respect to the guerrillas. In contrast, the critical voices incorporate nuances, at times almost excusing what ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ represents, conferring political and legitimizing elements, which require special attention.

Hence, we need to delve into the spaces of enunciation, interest and strategy generated by the language used in relation to the dissidence phenomenon, and also highlight the importance of understanding the way in which this phenomenon has been internalized by the former FARC-EP. This aspect obliges us to pause to analyze how the discourse is delivered, how the phenomenon is interpreted, or how it is framed in order to confer political meaning to the groups of dissidents, formed after the Peace Agreement (Lanza, 2017). Like any discursive analysis, the stories contained herein fall well short of presenting an objective reality *per se*, for, as Geertz (1987) suggests, they are themselves products of an ideology. However, this analysis does enable us to identify priorities, address responsibilities or legitimize positions through arguments not exempt from fallacy, exaggeration or euphemism (Van Dijk, 2007).

All interviews were conducted through work in Colombia that took place between February and April 2021. The purpose was always to select political profiles of maximum political responsibility in the partisan formation that succeeded the guerrilla. The organization of the interviews was semi-structured and developed around two main axes. In the first of these, the questions were directed at several specific issues: how the concept of dissidence was understood, who was responsible for its appearance, how it affected the Peace Agreement and, finally, what explanations and motivations would enable us to understand its development. The second axis, more specifically, asked about the three differentiated versions of dissident groups that appear in the narratives: “Segunda Marquetalia”, “Gentil Duarte” and, finally, the rest of the local dissident groups. In this way, the questions also sought to investigate how aspects such as the legitimacy or condemnation of violence are discursively framed among those who, in the end, opted for the use of arms. It should be noted that all interviews were recorded with the express permission of the interviewees, and were conducted between February 13, 2021 and April 20, 2021, with a duration of between forty and one hundred minutes each.

3. Theoretical framework and state of the art

The rise of breakaway movements after a peace agreement has been widely addressed in peace and conflict resolution research. Collier *et al.* (2003) noted that this is a common phenomenon, which should be considered as normal when an armed conflict or civil war comes to an end. Thus, aspects of a structural, symbolic and institutional nature are those that play a major role in establishing the foundations of a post-war rehabilitation process (Woodhouse *et al.*, 2015). Others such as Hegre and Nygard (2015) or Walter (2015) conditioned the chances of a return of the violence on the institutional capacity of the state, while Hatzell and Hoddie (2007) focused on the need to establish power-sharing mechanisms that deter a relapse into violence. Finally, Collier (2009), among others, stressed the importance of deploying, sooner rather than later, economic resources to transform the factors that support violence.

Efficient instruments for job training and the creation of socio-economic opportunities are assumed to be a necessary condition for reducing the impact of dissident groups (Nussio, 2018). This is by no means a trivial aspect when the armed conflict, as in the case of Colombia, has been developing in a highly fractured territory, which calls for public policies that promote investment, infrastructure or decentralization (Saleyhan, 2009) and institutional robustness (Hendrix, 2010).

Similarly, some highlight that negative electoral results on the part of the demobilized armed group may trigger an onset of expressions of violence (Walter, 2015; Keels, 2017). Another factor to consider, of great relevance in Colombia, is related to the continued existence of sources of illicit financing, which negatively affects the creation of a stable and lasting framework for peace (Mashike, 2007). At the same time, the importance of symbolic elements associated with the violence cannot be overlooked (Findley and Rudloff, 2012). That is, we need to address the lack of legitimacy and social support for the armed group undergoing civil reintegration (Gibson, 2018) or the conflicting imaginaries, fueled by prejudices and stereotypes, which stigmatize the former combatants (Nussio, 2018). The role of leadership in the structure and functioning of the armed group must also be considered (Conolly and Doyle, 2018), as well as the degree of internal cohesion and conviction when taking on a process of disarmament (Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012).

Finally, as Kaplan and Nussio (2018) have pointed out, there are other factors that drive or restrain the return to armed struggle (driving and restraining forces), and this requires focusing on the personal motivations and the structural and institutional conditions that lie behind ex-combatants returning to arms (Ríos *et al.*, 2019). In addition, there is the insecurity and lack of protection that feed what Kalyvas and Kocher (2007), among others, have defined as the “security dilemma”. In other words, ex-combatants, faced with uncertainty, return to violent organizations in the hope of finding greater security than that provided by demobilization.

A second body of literature that must be taken into consideration to understand the emergence of dissident armed groups following a peace agreement is related to factors that either promote or hinder the transition from arms to the ballot box of actors such as, in the case of Colombia, the guerrilla fighters. In the hypothetical case that the system meets minimum democratic standards, comparative experiences show how different groups, in the event of making such a transition, face a path plagued with obstacles and challenges in order to become more or less successfully integrated into the political system (Dudouet, Planta and Giessmann, 2016). To this effect, a relevant moment to assess the progress made towards such a transition are the first elections to take place after the signing of a peace agreement (Jarstad, 2008; Walter, 2015; Keels, 2017).

Two types of literature should be referred to in order to place the Colombian case in context. On the one hand, there are numerous works that have addressed the conversion of armed groups into political forces (Manning, 2004; Dudouet, 2012; Maras, 2014; Hensell and Gerdes, 2016). Broadly speaking, three main types of factors have been highlighted to assess the integration of the group into the system. Firstly, those internal to the group itself (Dudouet, 2012; Berti, 2013). These include the extent to which the group is centralized and institutionalized and how this affects its internal cohesion (Zyck, 2009; Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012). Likewise, the communication mechanisms and the commitment of the (type of) leadership to the conversion of the guerrilla group into a political force have been highlighted, notwithstanding the problems and tensions that may occur within the group (Dudouet, 2012). At the same time, program aspects become important, as they can reveal the interest in and capacity to adapt to democratic life. In this regard, the previous political experience, particularly electoral, of those who integrate the new organization may contribute to such a transformation (Manning and Smith, 2016). Social support for such groups, as well as their behavior during the armed struggle,

have also been highlighted in explaining their subsequent political performance. In fact, several cases from Central America during the 1980s and 1990s show the importance of these elements in the initial stage of the armed post-conflict (Allison, 2006).

In the case of Colombia, many studies have focused on the violence accompanied by disarmament and civilian reintegration practices in the context of the armed conflict. When the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) demobilized in 1991 (together with the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), the Quintín Lame indigenous guerrilla movement, and before that the M-19), it ended up being the target of reprisals from the FARC-EP's 5th Front, which considered it a traitor to the revolutionary cause (Villamizar, 2017). Officially, 18 massacres and 763 acts of violence took place. Later, on the occasion of the paramilitary demobilization of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in 2005, when more than 31,000 members laid down their arms, a series of violent acts also took place, resulting in more than 1,700 deaths (Nussio, 2011). Even today, in December 2022, and after six years since the signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, more than 350 former guerrilla fighters have been killed in the framework of the reintegration process (Indepaz, 2022).

Although notable literature exists concerning experiences of overcoming, abandoning, and transforming violence within the ranks of FARC-EP ex-combatants (Mouly *et al.*, 2019; Oetler and Rettberg, 2019), the same does not hold true for the academic study of how FARC-EP dissident groups have been formed. This gap has been filled by literature in the form of reports and briefings from entities such as Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2017, 2019, 2019, 2020, 2021), Indepaz (2018, 2020, 2020b) or Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (2019, 2020). Their contribution has enabled us to understand the dynamics of proliferation of dissident groups and their disputes over territory after the signing of the Agreement. However, the originality of this study lies in the fact that, to date, no contributions have analyzed this phenomenon from the perspective of those who were once key players in the FARC-EP and, in one way or another, continue to be recognized figures in its formation and political structure.

Despite all the existing literature, there are important gaps in the analysis that merit the attention of studies such as this one. Although an extensive literature has been identified that focuses on the structural, institutional, symbolic or cultural aspects that explain the return of violence, in the vast majority of cases, quantitative works and eminently positivist assumptions prevail. Thus, qualitative studies, focused on prioritizing the

individual, framing his or her perceptions and considerations about a phenomenon such as the one studied here, or analyzing the way in which a political discourse is elaborated and directed, are for the time being in the minority.

In this way, research for peace and conflict resolution, as well as security studies, continue to prioritize statistical assumptions, which can be theoretically generalized, but which ignore the level closest to the individual and the way he or she understands aspects that affect the security order – as is the case here with the phenomenon of the dissident groups that are heirs of the former FARC-EP. Therefore, understanding how the actors directly involved in a peace process, and specifically, as in this case, with the direct responsibility for claiming scenarios of commitment and protection for what a peace agreement represents, provides an ideal breeding ground for contrasting the existing theoretical framework with the personal and subjective interpretation of actors as relevant and close to the phenomenon as they are often ignored and even rejected by academia.

4. The government of Iván Duque and the continuity of an unresolved violence

November 26, 2022 marked the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Peace Agreement between the then FARC-EP guerrillas and the Colombian government of Juan Manuel Santos. This put an end to more than fifty years of armed confrontation, the longest and most violent armed conflict in Latin American history in the twentieth century. Since it was signed, institutions such as the Kroc Institute (2017) have not wavered in recognizing that the Colombian agreement has been the most ambitious and comprehensive of the last 34 agreements signed, which have led to the demobilization of around fifty armed groups. It is based on satisfying two traditional demands of the guerrillas, namely, rural reform and their political-democratic participation through a framework of guarantees, improvements and institutional reforms. It also provides a wide range of support and subsidies for the full reintegration of combatants into civilian life, since an excellent protocol has been established for the surrender of weapons.

On the other hand, the Peace Agreement, as a demand made by the State, identifies mechanisms for intervening in the unresolved problem of illicit drug trafficking and incorporates a whole component on victims, including the creation of a Truth Commission, a Special Jurisdiction for Peace framework and a Search Unit for people missing as a result of the conflict. Finally, an accompanying point for monitoring implementation is met.

Once the Agreement was signed, it was expected that the surrender of weapons and the definitive ceasefire would take place in 2017 and 2018, in addition to the development of the regulatory and institutional component that would facilitate the implementation of the Agreement. In other words, since 2019, the Agreement was supposed to have gained momentum in its most purely transformative dimension. Yet, on the contrary, on the arrival of Iván Duque to the presidency in August 2018, the implementation process entered a second stage of greater difficulties. ‘Uribismo’ came to power and tried to set in motion a whole process of (what we might call) ‘low intensity’ sabotage. That is, under the banner of defending “peace with legality” was hidden a significant skepticism towards the Agreement, in such a way that it was conceived as an inheritance from the previous government and, therefore, its application would depend on what the new Executive considered legal (González, 2021). It was within this complex framework, unusual in comparative law, that an attempt was made to undermine the implementation of peace in Colombia.

First, the Agreement was left out of the National Development Plan, thus curtailing any hint of budgetary autonomy. Then, the president and his supporters in Congress prevented the approval of some core elements, such as the implementation of 16 seats that would give a political voice in the legislature to the regions most affected by the internal armed conflict. As if this were not enough, the President himself tried to challenge the transitional framework envisaged by the Agreement, articulated around the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and given this was not possible, he opted to push for its defunding by 30% in mid-2019.

Notwithstanding all the above, the Peace Agreement has benefited from the institutional mechanisms of the Colombian State, as the pronouncements of the Constitutional Court and the Council of State have shown. Although this is a long-term process that will involve at least four different presidencies, the monitoring reports on the Peace Agreement, such as the one carried out by the Kroc Institute of the University of Notre Dame, report that, at present, 30% of what was planned has been achieved. However, a more skeptical and critical look at the course of events would suggest that in the last three years progress has barely been made at a rate of 2% per year.

Accordingly, of the six points that make up the Agreement, the end of the conflict (third point) and the implementation, verification and endorsement mechanisms (sixth) are those in which most progress has been made in fulfilling the terms set out in the

Agreement, with 49% and 58%, respectively, as reported in the latest implementation monitoring report published in December 2021. These are the less *thorny* aspects of the Agreement. Thus, the most important factor with respect to the end of the conflict, for example, was the surrender of weapons by the FARC-EP, which took place in mid-2017, as well as the deployment of economic resources for reintegrating combatants into civilian life.

That said, it is not surprising that, *stricto sensu*, everything strictly related to violence and peacebuilding has resulted in a significant deterioration of security since 2018 and up to the present. So much so that, between 2018 and 2022, the departments with a greater presence of criminal organizations and more violence against ex-guerrillas and social leaders were the ones with the highest levels of coca cultivation. As noted above, Antioquia, Caquetá, Chocó, Cauca, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo currently account for 90% of Colombia's coca production (UNODC, 2021), as well as the same percentage of violent deaths of former combatants, which currently exceeds 350 cases since the signing of the Peace Agreement (Indepaz, 2021; Verification Mission, 2021a, 2021b) – in addition to almost 80% of the killings of nearly 2,000 social leaders.

Moreover, the protagonists of the violence have gained strength in recent years. For example, the ELN has doubled its number of fighters from 1,800 in 2010 to more than 4,000 today. This is especially true for the northeastern and eastern corridor, bordering Venezuela, and several places on the Pacific coast, such as Chocó, Cauca and Nariño. Likewise, this has also occurred with the multitude of post-paramilitary structures, such as the Clan del Golfo, or criminal groups such as Los Pelusos, also associated with the illicit economies of drug trafficking, illegal mining and smuggling. The entire northeastern corridor (Arauca and Norte de Santander), bordering Venezuela, in addition to the south (Caquetá and Putumayo) and southwest (Cauca and Nariño) of Colombia, together with the department of Antioquia – with its own particular dynamics – are the scenarios of greatest dispute and, by extension, with greater presence of armed structures that, in one way or another, evoke the name FARC-EP, as will be seen below.

5. The 'Gentil Duarte' dissidents

The first of the dissident groups to show disagreement with the Peace Agreement was made up of three names in particular: ‘Iván Mordisco’, ‘Jhon 40²’ and, most notably, ‘Gentil Duarte’. The first to publicly show his distance from the Agreement, not even participating in the 10th Guerrilla Conference that was to endorse what had been agreed with the government, was ‘Iván Mordisco’. He even directed armed actions against a polling station in his area of influence on the same day that the peace agreement referendum was held. As early as June 10, 2016, almost six months before the final signing, he was responsible for issuing a statement that read as follows:

We have decided not to demobilize, we will continue the fight for the taking of power by the people for the people, independent of the decision taken by the rest of the members of the organization. We respect the decision of those who give up the armed struggle, lay down their arms and rejoin civilian life; we do not consider them our enemies³

‘Mordisco’ gained prominence in the FARC-EP in the traditional 1st Front, once ‘Operation Jaque’ took place in 2008, which resulted in the release of former presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, among other hostages, and the capture of the then commander of the 1st Front, Gerardo Aguilar, ‘César’. This allowed ‘Mordisco’ to rise to the leadership of the Front, although at the time he was already perceived as a troublemaker by the Secretariat, given his very close links with the drug trafficking business. Nevertheless, since 2016, the 1st Front’s area of influence has been concentrated in the departments of Meta, Guaviare and Vaupés, where coca plantations grow alongside large areas of dense rainforest and have strategic connections to the drug corridors to Venezuela and Brazil (InSight Crime, 2019).

For his part, ‘Jhon 40’ began his career as a guerrilla fighter in FARC-EP's 31st Front, under the guidance of one of the biggest promoters of drug trafficking within the guerrilla movement, ‘Negro Acacio’. Over the years he rose to become commander of the 43rd Front in the department of Meta, and it is estimated that in the middle of the last decade he was in charge of mobilizing up to 100 tons of coca annually (InSight Crime, 2019b). Since the dissidence of the FARC-EP was formed, it appears that ‘John 40’ has been one of those primarily responsible for consolidating their position in the Colombian-

² ‘Jhon 40’ switched positions in mid-2021, leaving ‘Gentil Duarte’ and joining the ranks of ‘Segunda Marquetalia’.

³ See: <https://verdadabierta.com/disidencias-de-las-farc-problema-en-crecimiento/>

Venezuelan corridor, especially in order to provide an outlet for the drugs produced in the east of the country. According to Indepaz (2020), ‘John 40’ was actually sent by ‘Gentil Duarte’ to co-opt the incipient residual structures of the FARC-EP that, since 2017, have begun to proliferate in departments such as Norte de Santander and Arauca. However, and as evidence of the opportunistic and constantly changing nature of the new dynamics of violence in Colombia, in mid-2021, public media reported on the turnaround of ‘John 40’ and his alleged new link to the ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ dissidents.

The top leader of this armed group is ‘Gentil Duarte’, who before the signing of the Agreement already served as commander of the Eastern Bloc and member of the Central General Staff, precisely to maintain a position of support for the Peace Agreement⁴. However, and although, unlike ‘Mordisco’, he did participate in the 10th Guerrilla Conference, he ended up adopting a deeply critical position, believing that the peace process was ignoring the fundamental issues underpinning the violence and was leading to the disarmament and defeat of the guerrillas (González Martín, 2019).

From the 7th Front, ‘Gentil Duarte’ denied any hint of commitment to the Peace Agreement and publicly announced his alliance with the 1st Front commanded by ‘Iván Mordisco’, along with other FARC-EP structures highly related to drug trafficking, such as those led by ‘Euclides Mora’, the same ‘John 40’ or ‘Julián Chollo’ – belonging to the 1st, 7th, 16th and 44th Fronts. At the end of 2016, this prompted first the General Staff of the Eastern Bloc, and then the Secretariat of the FARC-EP, to disavow ‘Duarte’s’ followers for insubordination, arguing that “this decision has been motivated by their recent conduct, in contradiction with our political-military line”⁵.

From 2017 to the present, the ‘Gentil Duarte’ group has been the fastest growing and most notorious of FARC-EP dissidents, both in terms of activism and presence in the territory, largely due to huge sources of funding from the illicit exploitation of coca, gold and timber (Indepaz, 2020). ‘Gentil Duarte’ has managed to co-opt different structures for their purpose, which, since 2017, have proliferated in coca-growing and border areas where the FARC-EP have maintained a particular foothold, such as the former 33rd (Norte de Santander), 28th (Casanare) and 10th (Arauca) Fronts. Moreover, their activism over the years has led to increased operational capacity, both in the departments of Meta

⁴ His appointment was a personal gamble by the FARC-EP commander-in-chief, ‘Timochenko’. Personal communication with the author of December 2, 2021.

⁵ See: <https://cn.reuters.com/article/colombia-guerrilla-idLTAKBN1431S1-OUSLD>

and Guaviare, as well as in other areas of the Colombian Orinoco and Amazon regions. (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2018).

Besides integrating different FARC-EP residual groups, such as the former 14th, 15th, 17th, 27th, 40th, 42nd and 43rd Fronts, into its structure, ‘Gentil Duarte’ has made specific alliances with the ELN in Arauca and Norte de Santander, and even with post-paramilitary groups such as the Clan del Golfo in the department of Guaviare. However, the extremely high fragmentation of violence at the local level, and the impossibility of aligning all the armed structures inherited from the FARC-EP, have led to major confrontations, mainly with ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ – in Sucre, Bolivar, Antioquia and Putumayo – and with residual groups in Nariño and Cauca.

6. The ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ dissidents

The rise of the ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ group differs completely from that of ‘Gentil Duarte’ since the former were created well after the signing of the Peace Agreement. As mentioned before, this group of dissidents was promoted by those who led the peace negotiations in Havana: ‘Iván Márquez’ and ‘Jesús Santrich’. Their first public appearance took place on August 29, 2019, when ‘Márquez’, alongside ‘Santrich’, ‘El Paisa’ (ex-commander of the Teófilo Forero Mobile Column), ‘Romaña’ (ex-commander of the Eastern Bloc), ‘Loco Iván’ (ex-commander of the 26th Front), ‘Walter Mendoza’ (ex-commander of the Libardo García Mobile Column) and ‘Zarco Aldinever’ (ex-commander of the 53rd Front), was seen reading out a statement with the images of Simón Bolívar and ‘Manuel Marulanda’ behind him. ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ claims to be a dissident group that continues the legacy of the FARC-EP, inasmuch as they resulted from the government’s non-compliance with an agreement that they consider to be denaturalized and at the service of a Colombian oligarchy, whom they hold jointly responsible and brand as traitors⁶.

‘Iván Márquez’ and ‘Jesús Santrich’ had denounced on several occasions the breaches and abuses to which the Peace Agreement had been subjected, both under the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos and that of his successor, Iván Duque. The trigger that led to the rupture with the peace process was the arrest in April 2018 of ‘Santrich’, accused by the Attorney General’s Office of maintaining links with the Mexican drug trafficking industry. A situation questioned on different occasions, including by the Special

⁶ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPZgtBnXr_g

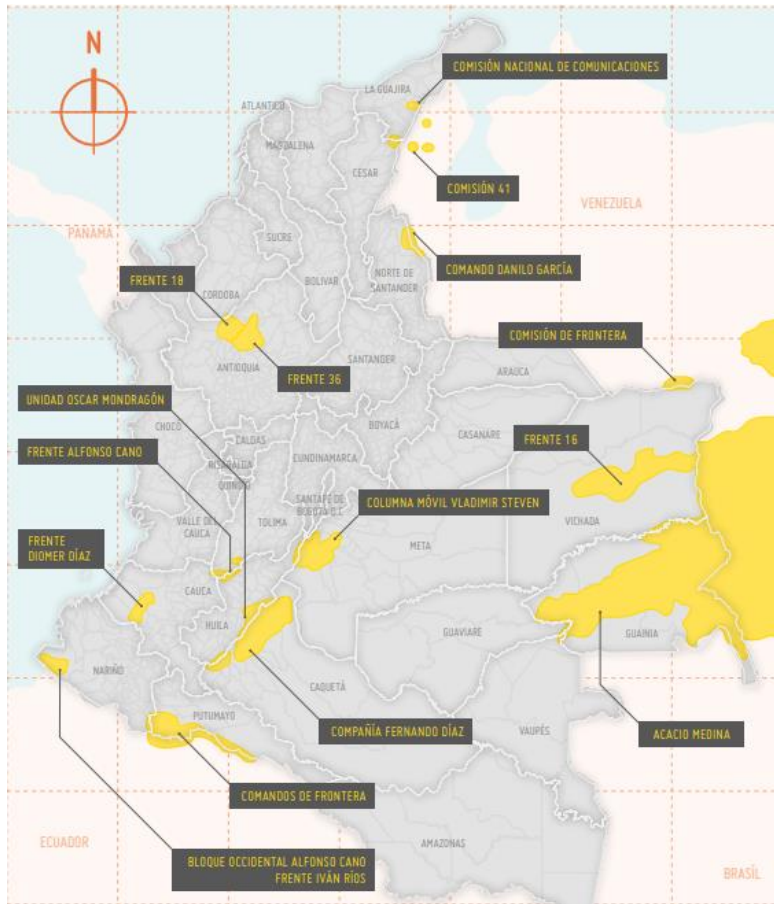
Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) itself, but which led to both the detention of ‘Santrich’ – effective until May 30, 2019 – and the issuing of an extradition request from the United States.

From the outset, ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ has advocated the legitimization of violence, while stressing their refusal to act on military targets – apart from self-defense – or to engage in kidnapping. In their first official statement, they acknowledged the need to enforce payment of economic contributions in their areas of operation, as well as their commitment to build alliances with groups such as the ELN. Although this framework of collaboration with the ELN was considered a priority for ‘Iván Márquez’, it is also true that it was proposed from a very different position than in the past. This is mainly because if one group has strengthened its position in some of the areas transformed by the demobilization of the FARC-EP (mainly in the Colombian-Venezuelan corridor where ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ has been launched), it is the ELN, which has become almost the dominant group in the region. Moreover, given the decentralized nature of this guerrilla group, any eventual collaboration is limited to the strictly local and circumstantial level, where, on many occasions, common enemies such as the Clan del Golfo or, at some point, the Oliver Sinisterra Front, have provided the only unifying factor. Thus, when asked about this, ‘Jesús Santrich’ acknowledged the following in an interview on July 30, 2020:

Unity is a revolutionary goal both for us and for the ELN, which we’ve been working to achieve since before the Havana Agreement, and now we continue to do so with all the more reason (...). We are fellow revolutionary organizations and as such we work on these two goals, perhaps with nuanced visions, differences more of a tactical order than of any other type, and we know that it’s our duty to pursue coordination, convergence and unity at all levels. We have the necessary tools for this and we’re fine-tuning and enhancing them⁷.

Map 1. Influence of the FARC-EP dissidence ‘Segunda Marquetalia’

⁷ See: <http://farc-ep.net/?p=2775>



Source: Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2021)

Although ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ has a very limited territorial position, initially operating in Venezuela, and has needed to collaborate with the ELN because third-party competitors such as the EPL, the Clan del Golfo or ‘Los Rastrojos’ are active in the region, it has also been facing another difficulty. This is related to the fact that ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ was created in August 2019, when many of the dissident structures had been operating independently since 2016 and 2017. Added to this is the notion that although ‘Gentil Duarte’ had dissociated himself from the Agreement from the very beginning, conversely, ‘Márquez’ and ‘Santrich’ were its main supporters – thus undermining any possibility of unifying around the ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ project.

After more than two years in force, the non-aggression pact and collaborative relations with both the ELN and the Venezuelan government contrast with the notable difficulty in strengthening their presence beyond Putumayo, Bolivar, Sucre and Antioquia, and some local areas of Cauca, Huila, Nariño and Caquetá. However, what has weakened ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ the most have been the disputes with the ‘Gentil Duarte’ dissidents since March 2021. Not only do these disputes explain the recent deaths of some of the

commanders of ‘Segunda Marquetalia’, such as ‘Santrich’, ‘Romaña’ or ‘El Paisa’, but they have also ended up confronting the ‘Gentil Duarte’ dissidents with the Venezuelan military forces.

7. Main residual and local dissident groups

Although it would appear that the two previous groups are disputing their claim to be the continuation of the FARC-EP, dozens of armed organizations have come on the scene in Colombia. All of them are more or less independent, and they are also claiming a connection with the guerrillas at the local level; in mostly peripheral enclaves in the vast majority of cases, with a marked coca-growing tradition and a clear border position, such as the eastern corridor, the Pacific coast or the south of the country (Ríos, 2021).

Some of the most prominent groups even predate the signing of the Agreement itself, such as the ‘Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico’ – ‘Nueva Gente’ or ‘Nuevo Orden’. Alias ‘Don Ye’, expelled from the FARC-EP’s 29th Front, has organized an urban criminal group made up of rank-and-file guerrillas and militia members with little experience, whose main area of operations was, and continues to be, the city of Tumaco, in Nariño. In fact, their main commander until August 2021, ‘Borojó’, fought for control of the city of Nariño against the Oliver Sinisterra Front – which has been split into two distinct structures since the beginning of 2021. Despite having a small number of members, close to a hundred, they have focused their actions on cocaine production in Tumaco neighborhoods, such as Viento Libre, Panama or Pital de la Costa. (Indepaz, 2020).

Shortly after the signing of the Agreement, in February 2017, another rebel organization was formed with the intention of being transferred to one of the 26 Transitional Zones for Normalization, where the FARC-EP were to carry out the process of handing over their weapons. A dissident faction of the former 6th Front was formed in the department of Cauca, between Corinto and Miranda, and is currently led by ‘Mayimbú’. This armed group has established itself as one of the main perpetrators of violence associated with the coca trade in Cauca, but also in other areas such as Jamundí (Valle del Cauca), Planadas (Tolima) and Iquira (Huila), where it appears to have collaborated with the ‘Gentil Duarte’ dissidents (Indepaz, 2020a).

Almost at the same time, the powerful Oliver Sinisterra Front was created in April 2017. Led by ‘Guacho’, the group is a continuation of the Daniel Aldana Mobile Column and was formed once the former guerrilla group had left the area of El Playón, in Tumaco.

‘Guacho’ was one of the first FARC-EP ex-combatants to appear publicly and acknowledge that the armed group, with more than 200 members, had arisen from their disapproval of the Peace Agreement⁸. Although ‘Guacho’ was killed in a military operation in 2018, the Oliver Sinisterra Front has been responsible for some of the violence in Nariño until early 2021, collaborating with different armed structures and trying to diversify its sources of financing (Indepaz, 2020)⁹.

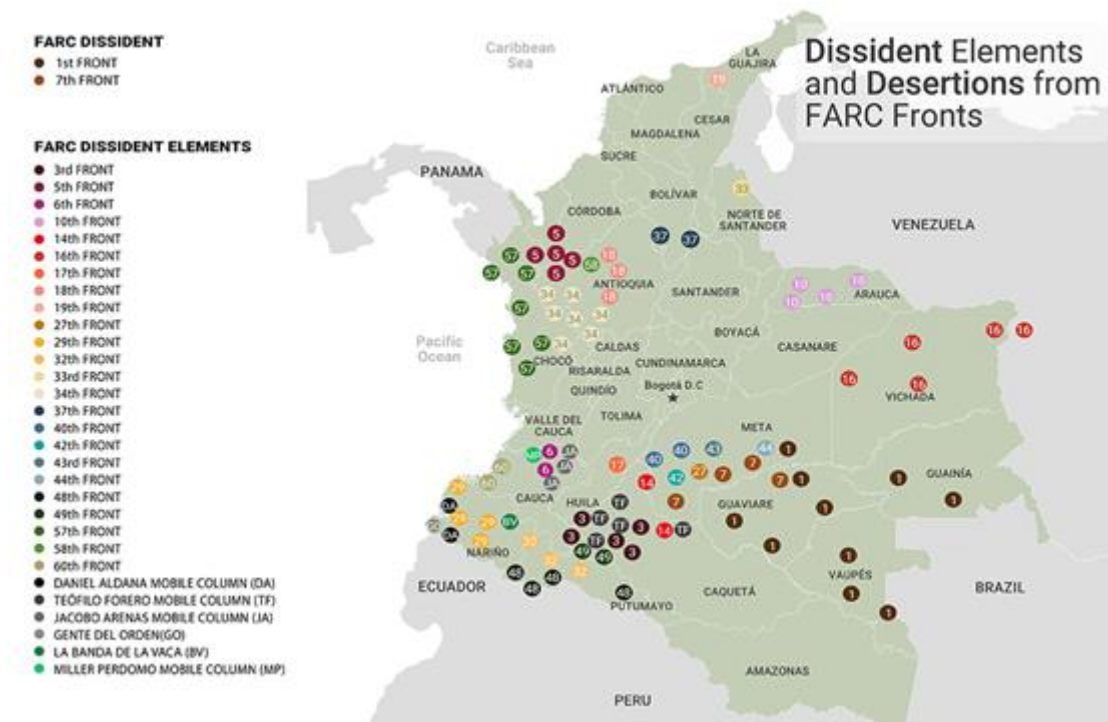
At the end of 2017, new dissident structures and groups had been formed, such as the continuation of the former 48th Front of the FARC-EP, located in the vast coca-growing region of Bajo Putumayo, and the formation of the Stiven Gonzalez Front in Nariño. The former is located in the municipalities of Puerto Asís and Puerto Leguízamo, with less than a hundred members, but with strong international connections. As such, it has acted in alliance, first with the criminal group ‘La Constru’ and the Oliver Sinisterra Front, and later with ‘Segunda Marquetalia’, in opposition to the interests of the ‘Gentil Duarte’ dissidents in the region¹⁰. For their part, the Stiven Gonzalez Front can be found in the vicinity of the Transitory Point in the Nariño municipality of Policarpa, supported by the former Daniel Aldana and Mariscal Sucre Mobile Columns, although operating in a rainforest setting with a high density of coca cultivation, such as Cumbitara, El Rosario, Leiva or Magüí Payán, in Nariño; and Balboa, in the south of Cauca, where they seem to have formed a strategic alliance with the ‘Gentil Duarte’ dissidents (Ríos, 2021).

Map 2. Main dissidents of the FARC-EP after the Peace Agreement

⁸ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsgDo5bfVvY>

⁹ According to Aguilera (2022), this structure has been totally disbanded since 2021 and any remnants have gone to two new groups: ‘Urias Rondon’, close to ‘Gentil Duarte’; and ‘Alfonso Cano’, aligned with ‘Segunda Marquetalia’.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/ivan-marquez-y-romana-llegan-al-meta-para-disputarle-las-rutas-del-narcotrafico-a-gentil-duarte/>



Source: InsSight Crime (2018)

On the other hand, in January 2018, the then governor of Antioquia, Luis Pérez, acknowledged the existence of dissident groups in areas where the guerrillas have traditionally been present, such as Ituango, Briceño, Toledo, Yarumal and Anorí. Today, guerrilla structures inherited from the FARC-EP’s former 18th and 36th Fronts operate there, under commanders such as ‘Cabuyo’, who in turn collaborates with third armed groups such as ‘Los Caparrapos’, ‘Los Mesa’ and ‘Los Pachely’, who are also active in the department. Similarly, since May 2018, the Ministry of Defense has recognized the existence of a new dissident group, heirs to the FARC-EP’s 10th Front and active in part of the department of Arauca. This same group went public by issuing a communiqué denying its alleged responsibility for an attack that took place at that time (Indepaz, 2020: 13). At the end of May 2018, the creation of the United Pacific Guerrillas Front, heir to the former 30th Front of the FARC-EP and active in Alto de Naya, Cauca, was also noted. Albeit with a level of activism largely confined to gold mining and cocaine transportation, this dissident group has recognized itself as “an active front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC-EP”, stating the following: “We are not drug traffickers or

bandits, neither are we a residual organization; we are an organization that pursues revolutionary principles and ideals”¹¹.

Just a few days later, on June 25, 2018, in the department of Norte de Santander, a communiqué was issued by another new dissident group, heir to the former 33rd Front of the FARC-EP. Commanded by ‘Jhon Milicias’, he expressed their opposition to the Peace Agreement, stating that “the necessary guarantees do not exist for the transition from armed struggle to legal political ‘mobilization’ as outlined in the Havana Agreement” (Indepaz, 2020b: 13). He also stated that under the command of ‘Gentil Duarte’ and with the mediation of ‘Jhon 40’ they were aiming to regain control of the territory of Catatumbo (Indepaz, 2020: 17). This is a hotly disputed region due to its high levels of coca cultivation and because it borders Venezuela, and, as previously mentioned, is also home to prominent armed groups such as the ELN, ‘Los Pelusos’ and the Clan del Golfo.

Between September and December 2018, the continued proliferation of dissidents gave rise to new groups in areas where guerrilla groups had traditionally been present, such as Casanare and Cauca. For example, in the latter department, in November 2018, in the municipality of Argelia, the ‘Carlos Patiño’ dissidents, led by ‘Mauricio’, appeared for the first time and confronted ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ in an attempt to gain control over the municipalities of El Tambo or Argelia in the heart of the department. In addition, speculation has suggested that the group maintains alliances with Mexican cartels interested in distributing Colombian cocaine from the Pacific coast.

8. The dissidence issue: responsible parties, impact on the Peace Agreement and criminal elements

Having outlined the intricate universe of the dissident groups, which, in one way or another, consider themselves heirs of the FARC-EP, it is time to take a look at the views expressed on the subject by the political representatives of the now defunct guerrilla group. An unavoidable starting point is, therefore, the Peace Agreement itself signed in November 2016. If we look at the follow-up reports it would seem that, more than six years after its signing, the delays and government resistance accumulated during this time are a matter of grave concern. According to the Kroc Institute (2017, 2019, 2019, 2020, 2021), the Agreement’s normative provisions were expected to have been cemented and the full laying down of arms guaranteed by 2017 and 2018. In addition, as of 2019, the

¹¹ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D4H9Xha9O8>

peace-building process was to have gradually transformed the socio-economic, territorial and institutional structures that supported the violence.

However, as previously noted, in both 2019 and 2020, barely 2% overall progress was made per year, so that the full degree of compliance is below 30%. The implementation of some points of the Agreement is still lagging behind, as is the case with the first point – Comprehensive Rural Reform – barely 4% fully implemented, or the second point – Political Participation – with 12% completed. To this effect, all the interviewees coincided in pointing out that the current Executive was responsible for the generalized climate of non-compliance and mistrust accompanying the Peace Agreement and which, by extension, has contributed to the formation of armed dissidents. When asked about the dissident groups, the interviewees responded without making a distinction or differentiation between one group or another, so that whatever terms were used, these groups were understood causally as a result of the problematic implementation carried out during the government of Iván Duque:

The main saboteur is the Democratic Center party, the Government itself, which stigmatizes the agreements, ignores them, distorts them, and does not comply with them, as is its obligation (...) Due to all the difficulties that have arisen in the implementation of the Agreement, critics within our party have raised their voices and some comrades have decided to take up arms again. This is very worrying, but these are things that arguably would not have happened had they complied with the accords. Interview with 'Pablo Catatumbo'.

The first ones to sabotage the Peace Agreement are the Government because they're the ones who aren't complying with it. They have the political duty to enforce and implement a commitment made by the State (...) They're just beating about the bush, making speeches and using images and figures that do not show the true picture. So that's sabotage. Interview with 'Pablo Atrato'.

In general terms, and even though all the interviewees agreed in normalizing the rise in dissident groups, they also coincided in acknowledging that the government was not only a "traitor" in the current situation, but that dissidence was an almost inseparable feature of the Colombian state. Thus, several testimonies coincided in linking the current situation of non-compliance and the rise of dissident groups with other moments in Colombia's particular political history.

Dissident groups have always sprung up in other peace processes, also for the same reasons, due to lack of compliance with the pacts between the government and the guerrilla signatories. This phenomenon has occurred throughout the history of Colombia and Latin America. Sandino, Pancho Villa or Guadalupe Salcedo were assassinated and all these betrayals have resulted in some people taking up arms again. Interview with 'Pablo Catatumbo'.

Here we're repeating what happened in the 50's, with Marulanda, when those who signed the agreements with the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship were given refuge by those who didn't sign (...) The same happened with the EPL and other movements. Some took up arms again, others continued fighting, and others demobilized of their own accord. Mistrust in the process has weighed heavily. Interview with 'Alirio Córdoba'.

Nevertheless, among both former FARC-EP leaders who today hold positions of political responsibility in Comunes and other more critical voices, it is possible to identify other aspects that help us to understand the dissidence phenomenon. Accordingly, these accounts have coincided in highlighting the difficulties experienced by former guerrillas in rejoining civilian life and the importance of continued sources of illicit financing, which serve as an incentive for them to abandon disarmament. A review of the current status of implementation of the Agreement highlights the lack of security guarantees and procedural delays that hinder the reintegration of ex-combatants, geared mainly towards agriculture. Although Decree Law 902 of 2017 empowers the National Land Agency to purchase and award land for reintegration purposes, by December 2021 most former guerrilla fighters were still working on leased land, and by November 2020 a total of 86 collective agricultural projects had been approved for 3,353 people, in addition to another 2,214 individual projects for 2,692 ex-combatants. These total figures do not even represent half of the total ex-guerrilla population (Kroc Institute, 2021).

Civilian reintegration, which is more or less 5% of the overall implementation of the Agreement, has not been fulfilled by the government. Today we still don't have land for agricultural projects. If anything, there are two areas that already have their land, but that's because the young people have managed it themselves (...) But apart from that, like the regions that we left alone, for example, drug trafficking forces and groups soon showed up and took advantage of the fact that in those same regions there were comrades of ours and they offered them money. Two, four, six and even

ten million pesos. These are generous offers that add uncertainty to a critical situation. Interview with 'Sandra Ramírez'.

To the above must be added the difficult solution to the illicit drug problem and sources of financing underlying the proliferation of armed structures. To date, the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use has experienced significant delays, in addition to a notable difficulty in articulating spaces for dialogue with civil society and a very significant increase in violence. For example, between 2017 and 2021, the departments with the highest presence of criminal structures and the greatest violence directed against former guerrilla fighters and social leaders were those with the highest levels of coca cultivation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2019; United Nations Verification Mission, 2021; Indepaz, 2021). In other words, Antioquia, Caquetá, Chocó, Cauca, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo currently account for 90% of Colombia's coca production (UNODC, 2021), since they are the places where most of the violent deaths of former guerrilla fighters have been committed since the Peace Agreement was signed (Indepaz, 2021; United Nations Verification Mission, 2021).

Already noted is the fact that more than 75% of the murdered social leaders and 90% of the ex-guerrillas killed since 2017 were concentrated in just nine departments. These areas present both the highest levels of armed activism and an extremely high level of involvement in the drug trafficking business. In successive reports published between 2017 and 2020 by the National Police, the departments of Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca have ended up accumulating a total of 578,504Ha under coca cultivation, which represents 90% of the total of 642,735Ha that were being cultivated in Colombia, at that time (Observatorio de Drogas, n.d.). For example, of the 1,018,049 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride seized between January 2017 and December 2020, 756,040 kilograms, equivalent to 74.20%, were seized in these departments (Observatorio de Drogas, n.d.). Likewise, up to 1,072 of the total 1,227 cocaine laboratories destroyed in the course of these four years (87.36%) were located there (Observatorio de Drogas, n.d.). Effectively, this link between drug trafficking and dissident groups could extend to other groups such as the one commanded by 'Gentil Duarte', as explained by former guerrilla Tania Nijmeijer below.

Among the interviewees' accounts, other explanations could be found for the formation of dissident groups, based on other motivations, such as a search for security that ex-combatants do not find in either the institutional framework or in civilian reintegration.

However, the latter coexists with other elements of a completely different nature, such as forced co-optation and selective killings of ex-combatants.

Although those who left (to form the dissidents) have already left, those who continue to leave do so because they feel threatened, they feel at risk in certain areas, like in Arauca. These are regions where insecurity runs deep and people are looking for ways to build ties with each other. Interview with 'Alirio Córdoba'.

There are three areas – Llano Grande, Cauca and Meta – where our men have been displaced by threats from dissidents because there are no guarantees in these territories. Interview with 'Sandra Ramírez'.

Notwithstanding the lack of commitment to the Agreement and difficulties associated with civilian reinsertion, as well as the proliferation of armed structures and the increase in illicit financing, several interviewees highlighted a common link: the need to define the term “dissidence”. This aspect is of great importance, since, as will be seen in more detail in the following section, many of the interviewees shared the need to differentiate ‘Gentil Duarte’ and ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ from the rest of the FARC-EP’s residual structures. This is due to the fact that these residual groups are mostly made up of mid-level commanders, militiamen or guerrilla fighters, with very little recognition within the former guerrilla, and without any “revolutionary” objective, as pointed out by ‘Victoria Sandino’ or ‘Alirio Córdoba’:

The only real dissidents are those who left with ‘Iván Márquez’, which I understand is not a large group. One other group that left before the signing of the Peace Agreement, namely ‘Gentil Duarte’. From then on, many groups have called themselves dissidents (...) They’re groups that have been set up around the drug trafficking business and, of course, it’s also true that because of the government’s failure to comply, many of these groups offer money and resources to our comrades. Interview with ‘Victoria Sandino’.

The vast majority are groups that have been organized in some territories and it turns out that they are led by former militia members and people who were not guerrillas, but could count on the presence of armed support in the form of militias. These new structures that call themselves dissidents are related to that. Many of them have links with this drug trafficking issue, but not with the FARC, because they’d already abandoned the FARC project before then. Interview with ‘Alirio Córdoba’.

Hence, one of the most relevant points for most of the interviewees was that the majority of the groups that claim and acknowledge some kind of continuity with the FARC-EP should, in reality, be understood as criminal groups. However, they have been aided by structural elements which, either due to the complexity of the factors that support the violence or to the lack of implementation of the Peace Agreement, have facilitated their emergence at the local level, as recognized by Tania Nijmeijer or ‘Benkos Biohó’:

I know the Cauca dissidents well. Most of them are what used to be FARC militiamen, without any political or ideological training, and now they happen to be commanders of these groups. Here in Cauca, we can’t speak of a political struggle. It’s a fight for the drug trafficking industry and there’s plenty of evidence of that. Interview with Tania Nijmeijer.

Many of these dissident groups have fallen into ordinary crime, making disastrous alliances in which the political identity of the FARC’s historical project is completely absent. They aren’t dissidents of a political project (...) and they’re basically dedicated to interweaving illicit and criminal financing. Interview with ‘Benkos Biohó’.

In conclusion, three distinctive elements can be recognized in the shared discursive universe within Comunes – whether from pro-government positions or critical sectors. First, the emergence of dissident groups has been normalized as a process inseparable from any peace-building process, especially in a Colombian State that is considered a “natural” saboteur of the Peace Agreement. Second, the importance of the erratic implementation of the Agreement has been stressed, especially in terms of civilian reintegration and reducing the factors of direct violence. Finally, consensus has also existed on the need to differentiate the structures commanded by ‘Gentil Duarte’ and ‘Iván Márquez’ from the rest of the armed groups, which are predominantly criminal in nature.

9. ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ and ‘Gentil Duarte’: differences and nuances regarding *true* dissidence

Depending on which sector the interviewee was from, the main differences in discourse lay in how ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ was perceived. While it was commonplace to recognize the contributions made by ‘Iván Márquez’ and ‘Jesús Santrich’ to the peace process, it was also true that the official sector of Comunes adopted a general position of detachment

and condemnation, not so evident among the voices critical of the political party, who legitimized the return to violence as a response to the failure of the government to comply with the Agreement. This was also the case when asked about ‘Gentil Duarte’, such that the critical sector gave some recognition to this group, because they were created as a response to an agreement they do not support, but they were strongly condemned by the official sector of Comunes. Conversely, a political significance was often given to ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ by leading figures from the critical sector such as ‘Victoria Sandino’, ‘Benkos Biohó’, ‘Alirio Córdoba’ or ‘Pablo Atrato’, which was absent in the case of ‘Gentil Duarte’. Put another way, while neither ‘Gentil Duarte’ nor ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ can be compared to the criminal groups discussed in the previous section, they are rejected indiscriminately by the leadership of Comunes, although important nuances exist among the critical sectors of the party. In any case, note the vehemence of the official party sector when asked about ‘Gentil Duarte’:

Drug trafficking has permeated Colombian society and it has permeated us. We were no strangers to it. As a result, before the process, some left, defected. As a result, the groups led by ‘Gentil Duarte’, ‘John 40’ and ‘Ivan Mordisco’ were formed. At no time did they sign. “We aren’t going, [the Agreement] is a betrayal”. They failed to see, they didn’t grasp the meaning of the Agreement. Interview Sandra Ramírez.

Not attending or doing what they did (breaking with the consensus of the 10th Conference) we see it as a disappointment. The damage that has been done is known and continues to cause a very complicated situation (...) Those comrades say that we are the traitors. Interview with Rafael Malagón.

Among the official supporters, some like ‘Pedro Baracutao’ go even further, highlighting certain political opportunism on the part of ‘Gentil Duarte’, stating that their position, unlike that of other figures, was not openly critical at the 10th Guerrilla Conference¹². That is, their emergence as a dissident group should be understood instead as a response to the negative result obtained by the agreement referendum held on October 2, 2016, in which the pro-Peace Agreement position was defeated.

At the 10th Guerrilla Conference we all endorsed the Agreement. Nobody came out of there saying they were against the Peace Agreement (...). Gentil was at the conference, but his decision came after Cartagena and the referendum (...). As far as

¹² The aspect recognized here is not entirely clear, as contradictory versions exist. This is because there are those who assert that ‘Gentil Duarte’ made clear his animosity to the Peace Accord before it was signed.

they were concerned, we complied, we considered then that they weren't right, but today we look at the Colombian Government and it's left the signatories of the Agreement in a very bad light. It's failed to comply with the Peace Agreement and this has allowed Gentil's people and the wrongly named dissidents to grow. Interview with 'Pedro Baracutao'.

The sector critical with the official party line of the former FARC-EP have adopted a clearly cautious approach with respect to 'Gentil Duarte'. Some interviewees, such as Tania Nijmeijer or 'Alirio Córdoba', differentiate the 'Gentil Duarte' group from the 'Segunda Marquetalia' group, understanding that the former lacks a political component and, in addition, is motivated by the drug business, as these two accounts state:

Gentil is following the same path that the FARC took before. Meetings with the people, tax collection, organizing people, etc. But also the bad things. The same machismo as always and ties with drug trafficking (...) Even though they were born of the discontent that many of us felt with the Agreement and the feeling that this was not going to work, in the end I'd say like, "hey, if you think this isn't going to work, why don't you do something better than what we already had?" Interview with Tania Nijmeijer

Gentil was the man who controlled the arms caches. He knew how to organize a plan with men. He started with 300 rifles from the best confiscations. Arms in perfect condition and he started in coca-growing areas, where just by charging taxes, that already meant an income. They're accused of being mixed up in other things. I'm not aware of it, but being where they are, in areas under cultivation, means a large income in itself. Interview with 'Alirio Córdoba'.

Different assessments have been made with respect to 'Segunda Marquetalia'. Several factors already pointed out should be emphasized in this regard: the political leadership of 'Márquez' and 'Santrich' in the peace negotiations and, also, their majority position during the early stages of the formation of the political party. As noted at the outset, they both gained the majority of support at the founding congress of the guerrilla heir party in August 2017. Likewise, they defended the first name chosen for the party, Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), and the first ideological principles (April thesis). While the former FARC-EP commander-in-chief, Rodrigo Londoño, would be the party's president, 'Márquez' and 'Santrich' would head the lists for the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively, in Congress, so they would play an important role in shaping the electoral lists and designating political positions within the party

structure. However, this would lead to fractured political loyalties between those who supported Londoño, such as senators ‘Sandra Ramírez’, ‘Pablo Catatumbo’ or ‘Carlos Lozada’, and those who maintained greater political proximity to ‘Márquez’, such as senators ‘Victoria Sandino’ and ‘Benkos Biohó’, or the representative of the House of Representatives, ‘Alirio Córdoba’. These factors may help to better understand the different responses given by the political representatives of the now-defunct guerrilla group when asked about the dissidents known as ‘Segunda Marquetalia’. Thus, among the official sector of the party, feelings fluctuated between betrayal and selfishness, as pointed out by ‘Ramírez’ and ‘Malagón’:

The people headed by Iván Márquez regrouped, they left. They said goodbye to us. You stay here with this heavy boat, see how you push it, but I’m off. It really hurt me when they did that. That was betrayal, because one (Márquez) was the head of our delegation in Havana (...) and the other was one of our rapporteurs, who helped a lot. They excluded themselves from the party, and from the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Agreement. Interview with ‘Sandra Ramírez’.

In 2019, the “Segunda Marquetalia” was proclaimed and rearmed, while on November 21, 2019 the vast majority of society was mobilized under the “no more wars” banner. I’m not going to discredit them, but the revolutionary legacy of our historical organization is to be by the side of our people, their problems and needs, and the people were telling them (to Segunda Marquetalia) that they didn’t want that. We stand by the people and their problems, not imposing, giving orders and forcing them into submission. Interview with ‘Rafael Malagón’.

However, these arguments bear no relation to the position adopted by the interviewees outside the official sector of Comunes. Their shared response tended to be that, on the contrary, ‘Segunda Marquetalia’ could not possibly have done anything but rearm, given the persecution and questioning that some of its leaders underwent, especially between 2018 and 2019. All the spokespeople from this sector of the defunct FARC-EP coincided in recognizing the political figure of ‘Márquez’ as a victim of the process of non-compliance with the Agreement. They considered him to be committed to peace, thus exonerating him from a spirit of violence such as the one they perceived in the ‘Gentil Duarte’ group or the rest of the groups that have proclaimed themselves as heirs of the guerrillas.

The only dissidents were 'Iván Márquez' and the group that left with 'Iván Márquez', which I understand is not a large group, and which is related to the set-up and sabotage carried out in particular by the former Attorney General of the nation, Néstor Humberto Martínez, who not only sabotaged peace, but also carried out an attack against the peace of Colombia. Interview with 'Victoria Sandino'.

I have known 'Santrich' for many years, since before he was a guerrilla fighter, and I know he's an honest guy, a straightforward guy, and that drug trafficking has nothing to do with him (...) they left him no other way out than to go back to the mountains, they left him no other way out. Interview with 'Pablo Atrato'.

Conclusions

This particular way of analyzing how dissident groups have been formed yields a number of relevant conclusions. In addition to common and differential aspects already presented above, it is important to identify how many of the issues recognized by the specialized literature on peace research have been raised by the former leaders of the FARC-EP as a warning of unresolved or unaddressed problems, which, to a large extent, account for the different dissident groups that have been created since 2016.

There appears to be a general consensus that the inevitable starting point for a loose understanding of the dissidence phenomenon involves the absence of changes in the conditions underlying the violence in Colombia, especially in structural terms. In this respect, and more than in relation to institutional capacity, most of the accounts have complained of a marked lack of governmental commitment, suggesting that the current government is playing the role of saboteur of the Agreement.

This concerns elements that were identified in the theoretical framework and that are also reflected in the interviewees' accounts. Aspects to consider are not only the shortcomings in facilitating civilian reintegration and building socioeconomic opportunities, but also threats from groups that try to co-opt former guerrillas by offering large sums of money in exchange for their return to criminal activity. In other cases, and in keeping with the security dilemma, dissidence can sometimes be understood as an option that affords protection from the violence that takes place in the spaces of transition back to civilian life.

Some interviewees, especially in relation to the group commanded by 'Gentil Duarte', but also in relation to 'Segunda Marquetalia', acknowledged that the electoral result of

the referendum and Uribe's subsequent electoral victory was a reality check in terms of the real possibilities that one could expect from the political project of the FARC-EP. Nonetheless, they have normalized part of the phenomenon and associate it with the responsibility of a State, which is seen as not complying, as has been the case with previous disarmament and peace-building experiences. This is important for understanding the two major dissident groups, understood as exceptions to a general process more associated with groups of a criminal nature, with no political motivation whatsoever.

In terms of differences, it is noteworthy how the official position of Comunes avoids any possible recognition of the dissidence phenomenon and insists on the need to understand that the only way to peace is through commitment to the Agreement. This has nothing to do with the more critical political sector, which makes use of its resources to introduce political differences and nuances, arguing that, as far as 'Segunda Marquetalia' is concerned, there was practically no other option, given the generalized situation of non-compliance with the Agreement.

Whatever the case, exaggerations, value judgments and other subjective elements end up constructing a reality, that of the FARC dissidents, in which the narrative device becomes a tool to be considered for future academic work aimed at further exploring this issue. This task can be completed by placing greater emphasis on the territorial dimension, and by gathering and analyzing testimonies from the places most affected by the tensions and contradictions that accompany the peace-building process. Similarly, a distinction can be made between the narratives coming from the political elites, only addressed here, and other narratives from the guerrilla ranks and mid-level commanders. No doubt these can provide nuances, perceptions and expectations that may be addressed in contrast to the ones presented here.

Finally, and in similar terms, it is worth highlighting the need to enrich the way of conceiving the phenomenon of security of FARC-EP ex-combatants, and of conceiving the reproduction of violence after the 2016 Peace Agreement, with an object of study that is as polysemic as it is changing. Undoubtedly, these accounts should serve to understand a much-needed public policy that redefines the different groups, which, in one way or another, claim for themselves the legacy of the FARC-EP name. This is because, based on what has been presented here, both "Segunda Marquetalia" and "Gentil Duarte" and

the so-called residual structures, for example, of the Colombian Pacific coast, are involved and interact – with many nuances – in the chessboard of Colombian violence.

This is a fact that the new government of Gustavo Petro will have to take into consideration when engaging in dialogue and negotiations, some of which of a political nature, when dealing with different manifestations of armed violence, ranging from guerrilla and dissident groups to post-paramilitary groups and drug traffickers. This dialogue must necessarily be in line with the Colombian government's new peace policy.

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