

The Untold Story of the Workers' Revolutionary Party in Colombia

The PRT's Transformation from a Clandestine Party into a Legal Political Actor

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Abstract

In armed conflicts that follow heterogeneous regional patterns, negotiated solutions must respond to the characteristics of the sub-national level and take regional power relations into account. The fate of the little known Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT) – one of four Colombian insurgent groups that demobilised in the early 1990s, participated in the National Constituent Assembly in 1991 and subsequently sought their way into legal politics, illustrates the risks that may emerge if peace negotiations do not follow this principle. This paper seeks to draw lessons from one of the untold stories about the Colombian armed conflict by analysing both the roots, the ideological foundations and the characteristics of the PRT, as well as its process of negotiation and transformation into a legal political actor. These lessons may be of high value in light of the ongoing peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP.

About the Publication

This paper is one of four case study reports on Colombia produced in the course of the collaborative research project ‘Avoiding Conflict Relapse through Inclusive Political Settlements and State-building after Intra-State War’, running from February 2013 to February 2015. This project aims to examine the conditions for inclusive political settlements following protracted armed conflicts, with a specific focus on former armed power contenders turned state actors. It also aims to inform national and international practitioners and policy-makers on effective practices for enhancing participation, representation, and responsiveness in post-war state-building and governance. It is carried out in cooperation with the partner institutions CINEP/PPP (Colombia, Project Coordinators), Berghof Foundation (Germany, Project Research Coordinators), FLACSO (El Salvador), In Transformation Initiative (South Africa), Sudd Institute (South Sudan), Aceh Policy Institute (Aceh/Indonesia), and Friends for Peace (Nepal). The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Berghof Foundation, CINEP/PPP, or their project partners. To find more publications for this project please visit www.berghof-foundation.com. For further information, please contact the project research coordinator, Dr. Véronique Dudouet, at v.dudouet@berghof-foundation.org.

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List of Acronyms

ADM-19	<i>Alianza Democrática M-19</i> / Democratic Alliance M-19
ADO	<i>Movimiento Autodefensa Obrera</i> / Workers' Self Defence Movement
ANC	<i>Asamblea Nacional Constituyente</i> / National Constituent Assembly
ANUC	<i>Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos</i> / National Association of Peasant Producers
CGSB	<i>Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar</i> / Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Board
CNG	<i>Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera</i> / National Guerrilla Coordination Board
CPU	<i>Comité por la unidad de los Marxistas Leninistas</i> / Committee for the Unity of the Marxists and Leninists
CRS	<i>Corriente De Renovación Socialista</i> / Socialist Renovation Movement
CORPADEC	<i>Corporación por la Paz y el Desarrollo Comunitario</i> / Corporation for Peace and Community Development
DDR	Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration
ELN	<i>Ejército De Liberación Nacional</i> / National Liberation Army
EPL	<i>Ejército De Liberación Popular</i> / Popular Liberation Army
ENO	<i>Equipo Nacional de Operaciones</i> / National Operations Team
FARC	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i> / Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FENASINTRAP	<i>Federación De Empleados Públicos</i> / Federation of Public Employees' Trade Unions
FECODE	<i>Federación Colombiana de Educadores</i> / Colombian Federation of Educators
FENANSIBANCOL	<i>Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios</i> / National Federation of Bank Employees' Trade Unions
FMLN	<i>Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional</i> / Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
M-19	<i>Movimiento 19 de Abril</i> / 19th of April Movement

MAQL	<i>Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame</i> / Armed Movement Quintín Lame
MIR-PL	<i>Movimiento de Integración Revolucionaria - Patria Libre</i> / Revolutionary Integration Movement - Free Fatherland
MRT	<i>Movimiento Revolucionario de los Trabajadores</i> / Revolutionary Workers' Movement
PCC-ML	<i>Partido Comunista de Colombia - Marxista Leninista</i> / Colombian Communist Party – Marxist Leninist
PRT	<i>Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Colombiano</i> / Workers' Revolutionary Party
SEDECO	<i>Sindicato Textil Coltejer</i> / Coltejer Workers' Union
SINTRAPOPOPULAR	<i>Trabajadores del Banco Popular</i> / Banco Popular Workers' Union
TMLM	<i>Tendencia Marxista-Leninista-Maoísta</i> / Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Tendency

1 Introduction

*We believed and decided that [...] we could grow [...] through this process [of demobilisation] within legal democracy, achieving development with social inclusion and political pluralism; that the abandonment of arms [...] would open political spaces to influence, in a civilised or rational way, the solution of regional and national problems which neither the Colombian state nor the traditional political elites had resolved over decades. (PRT 2014)*¹

Solving regional and national problems through its participation in legal Colombian politics – nothing more and nothing less was the expectation of the Colombian Workers' Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, PRT) at the time of its demobilisation in 1991. However, a PRT delegation attending a UNDP conference on victims of the Colombian conflict in Barranquilla on 17 July 2014 drew a deeply disillusioned balance of the past 23 years since the party had literally thrown its arms into the Caribbean Sea by denouncing an extermination campaign against former party members. In spite of gaining access to Colombian politics and a true opportunity to change structural injustices and exclusive patterns from within the political system, the PRT's political project was hampered by the persistence of politically-motivated violence and an exclusive political culture. By shaming the traditional regional political and economic elite as the principal mastermind of such an extermination campaign, the delegation raised the question of whether a meaningful participation in Colombian politics at the regional level would have been at all possible after a peace agreement was signed with the national government (PRT 2014).

In armed conflicts that follow highly heterogeneous regional patterns, such as in the Colombian case, solutions must respond to regional logic. Although largely unknown, the experience of one of the smallest of the five Colombian guerrilla groups that demobilised between 1990 and 1994² provides important lessons for understanding the transformation of armed groups into political parties and their role in peace processes. Although the PRT also had some influence in other regions of the country, both its peace negotiation and post-war political project predominantly focused on Northern provinces, such as Atlántico, Bolívar and Sucre, all of which are characterised by patterns of political exclusion and high levels of land concentration in the hands of a small, local elite. As a result, over the past five decades, the region has been the centre stage for intensive peasant mobilisation for land reform. This has provoked a violent response by the elite, who have progressively developed close alliances with emerging paramilitary groups (González 2014).

Based on a large sample of interviews and three focus group discussions with low, middle and high-ranking members of the former PRT, as well as a review of the party's organ (*Viraje*) and other primary sources, this paper aims to shed light on an untold chapter of Colombian history and to analyse the experience of the Colombian PRT in order to identify the diverse reasons for the relative failure of its political reconversion. While the first section traces the origins of the party back to the Colombian Maoism of the 1970s and highlights the early ideological foundations and characteristics of the PRT, the second section focuses on its ideological shift, which led to peace negotiations and its demobilisation in 1991. Subsequently, the paper analyses the party members' post-war expectations and highlights the PRT's initial success in legal politics. The fourth and last section finally discusses the factors that ultimately led to the failure of the PRT's political project.

¹ All quotations in this paper were translated by the author from Spanish into English.

² These groups were: 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril, M-19); Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL); Armed Movement Quintín Lame (Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame, MAQL); Revolutionary Workers' Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, PRT); Socialist Renovation Movement (Corriente de Renovación Socialista, CRS). For more information on these movements and their transitions, see Rampf and Chavarro 2014.

2 Origin, Ideology and Characteristics of the PRT

The roots of the PRT date back to the diverse spectrum of Maoist movements around the Colombian Communist Party – Marxist Leninist (*Partido Comunista de Colombia – Marxista Leninista*, PCC-ML). This orthodox sector of the Colombian revolutionary left was largely characterised by its critique of the traditional communists (both parties and armed groups) as being reformists. By insisting that only a true revolution leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat mattered, Maoists rejected the possibility of a peaceful coexistence of capitalist and socialist ideas, and thus also opposed any form of participation in bourgeois institutions. An expression of the latter was for instance a strict policy of abstention in any kind of electoral process (Archila 2008).

The PCC-ML experienced an internal crisis in late 1974, triggered by internal discrepancies over the strategic route to be followed by the party. This crisis led to an internal split, with the majority of party members forming the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Tendency (*Tendencia Marxista Leninista Maoista*, Tmlm). The Central Committee of the PCC-ML went on to follow dogmatically the leading example of Mao's Chinese revolution and adhered to the armed struggle centred in the countryside as the only strategy able to give rise to a true revolution, while underestimating the importance of urban sectors of the proletariat. For its part, the Tmlm questioned this guiding principle and opted for an orientation based on the national reality rather than that of other countries, and particularly criticised the party's disconnection to urban protest movements. Although its party organ *Viraje* still stressed that "the violent resistance of reactionaries shows that only the path to power is through a violent revolution" (Viraje 1979, 18), and recognised the important role of the peasant sector in the revolution, it also highlighted the essential task of engaging more closely with urban protest movements (Flórez, Author Interview 2013 and 2014).

The Tmlm became affected by internal divisions shortly after having been expelled from the PCC-ML, and experienced several splits, for instance by a faction known as the *Ruptura* as well as the Revolutionary Workers' Movement (*Movimiento Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, MRT). The minority faction within the Tmlm later became part of the Revolutionary Integration Movement - Free Fatherland (*Movimiento de Integración Revolucionaria - Patria Libre*, MIR-PL) which at the end of the 1980s joined the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – ELN). For its part, the party's majority faction went on to establish the PRT during a conference in Sucre, in 1982 (Archila 2008; Restrepo and Contreras 2000; Villarraga and Plazas 1994).

At least initially, the PRT closely adhered to the ideological roots and the Maoist orientation of the Tmlm. The true revolution for the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat remained the overall objective, meaning that any kind of negotiated solution or reform was rejected. In 1983-85, a number of armed movements such as the Workers' Self-defence Movement (*Movimiento de Autodefensa Obrera*, ADO), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC), the 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*, M-19) and subsequently, the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL), entered into negotiations with the Betancur administration. The PRT, together with the ELN and other smaller groups, categorically rejected this presidential initiative as a "game following the purpose of the bourgeoisie" and considered "any agreement implying a cessation of operations [as] a defeat and setback for all popular [revolutionary] movements" (Viraje 1984, 11). The movement still regarded armed resistance as the inevitable answer to an oppressive and exclusive political regime controlled by a small Colombian elite, which was influenced by imperialistic powers. In line with the former rhetoric of the PCC-ML, other guerrilla groups such as the FARC were derogatorily referred to as "traitors of the revolution".³

In accordance with these basic convictions, the party's strategy consisted of two lines of action: First, to attract mass support for the revolution by agitation, training and organisation of the popular masses, and secondly, to mobilise a people's army that should later overthrow the state apparatus controlled by the exploiting classes (Viraje 1983; 1984).

According to the first line of action, the PRT followed the tactical orientation of the Tmlm and aimed to influence rural peasants as well as urban-based social movements. By fostering relations dating back to the PCC-ML, as well as by

³ For instance, at its 5th plenum in 1973, the Central Committee of the PCC-ML called the FARC a bunch of counter revolutionaries serving the oligarchy (Villarraga and Plazas 1994).

winning over new sympathisers, the organisation managed to gain significant influence in the National Association of Peasant Producers (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*, ANUC), various trade unions, student movements and in some poor urban districts of major cities such as Medellín and Bogotá.

While many regional leaders of the ANUC became middle and high-ranking cadres of the PRT (especially in the Caribbean coastal region), other members of the PRT held positions within diverse regional and national trade unions, in some cases even on their boards of directors. Among others, the PRT had strong direct representation in the Coltejer Workers' Union (*Sindicato Textil Coltejer*, SEDECO) and the Anchicaya Workers' Union (*Sindicato de Trabajadores de Anchicaya*), both of them regional trade unions in the cities of Medellín and Cali respectively. They also had strong direct representation in various unions of the bank sector, such as the Banco Popular Workers' Union (*Sindicato de Trabajadores del Banco Popular*, Sintrapopular), the Bank of Santander Workers' Union and later, in the National Federation of Bank Employees' Trade Unions (*Federación Nacional de Sindicatos Bancarios*, Fenansibancol). Furthermore, the PRT had significant influence in the Federation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (*Federación Nacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadores y Empleados Públicos*, Fenasintrap), as well as on one of the biggest and most powerful Colombian trade union, the Colombian Federation of Educators (*Federación Colombiana de Educadores*, FECODE). Additionally, the party gained some influence in indigenous communities, especially in the Cauca region (Tobón, Author Interview, 2014; Cuello, Author Interview, 2014).⁴

In keeping to the second line of action, PRT's short-term plan was to build up small self-defence and militia groups (Viraje 1984). The implementation of this second strategic component had serious limitations in both financial resources and know-how, so it remained rather embryonic throughout the 1980s, until the party's final demobilisation in 1991 (Focus Group Discussion, Author Interview 2014c).

Despite the militaristic discourse that the PRT developed since its creation, it was not until 1983 that it managed to build up its own, albeit still very limited, military structures – first in the Cauca and Nariño provinces, and subsequently in the Montes de María province near the Caribbean coast. The PRT's military experiences in Cauca and Nariño were rooted both in reconstruction movements after the Popayan earthquake in 1983 and in the local indigenous communities. They became seriously weakened by confrontations with the XIth *frente* of the FARC (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014).⁵ For its part, the military structure set up in Monte María built on self-defence initiatives launched by the local peasant movement. It grew and consolidated itself at the end of the 1980s, under PRT Commander "Pablo". Besides these rural armed groups that mostly preserved their characters as self-defence groups (Aguilar 2013), the PRT maintained an urban military structure responsible for logistical tasks, known as the National Operations Team (*Equipo Nacional Operativo* – ENO). In order to obtain resources, the ENO carried out, for example, a series of bank robberies and kidnappings in Barranquilla, Medellín and other major Colombian cities (Barrios, Author Interview, 2014; Camilo, Author Interview, 2014; Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a).

In sum, the development and the influence of the armed wing of the PRT must be regarded to have been minimal. When former PRT National Directorate member, Gabriel Tobón (Author Interview, 2014), retrospectively assess the actual importance of the party's armed wing, he highlights the military experiences as "very insignificant and completely marginal in the total spectrum of armed groups in Colombia". The organisation itself, in the context of an internal evaluation in 1990, spoke of a "scanty military development" (Viraje 1990, 53) and thereby proved another one of its characteristics: the capability of self-reflection and self-criticism.

Since its foundation, the PRT maintained a lively internal discussion about its strategic direction, the overall condition of the organisation, and about the Colombian revolutionary left. It thus took up a tradition of the latter, which constantly debated about the right way to achieve revolution. In contrast to other organisations, especially the Maoist-oriented ones, the PRT tolerated more or less free internal discussion and refrained from expelling fractions simply because of their divergent opinions (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a; Urueta, Author Interview, 2014b). As a result,

4 Following the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist strategy of revolution, the objective is to infiltrate all segments and institutions of society and use this 'influence' in the moment of the final revolution.

5 According to a former high-ranking PRT member, Enrique Flórez, the attempt to create a *frente* (front) in the Cauca region had failed. Among other reasons, this was due to hostilities with the FARC, who had killed 15 PRT rebels in an attack (Flórez 2013).

critical evaluations of the state of the party concluded that there were general limitations with regards to both of its lines of action, as well as more specific problems with regards to its internal communication, which affected the top-down commanding structure and authority of the National Directorate. Due to the lack of effective communication mechanisms, most operations were led by individual regional leaders rather than being part of a coherent national plan (Viraje 1984). Moreover, the inadequate tactical and ideological training of the cadres brought about another perpetual internal discussion (Viraje 1984). As regards the strategic and tactical direction of the PRT and of the revolutionary Left in general, the discussion focused especially on the optimal balance between dogmatism and empiricism (Viraje 1983).

Another aspect that characterised the PRT was its call for unity of various revolutionary forces, both at the national and international level. This trait was both a heritage of the Tmlm,⁶ and an outcome of the strong influence exerted by the successful Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the experience of the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN) on the Colombian left. The traditional sectarianism of the Colombian left was seen by the PRT as one of the biggest obstacles *en route* to revolution (Viraje 1983; 1984; Falla, Author Interview, 2014; Flórez, Author Interview, 2013). While PRT's call for unity was initially restricted to revolutionary movements close to its own ideology (such as the MIR-PL and ELN), the party later adopted a more inclusive approach by supporting the coordination of the entire revolutionary left, in parallel with its gradual adoption of a pragmatic ideology. As argued by former leading member (and negotiator) Flórez,

At that time [at the beginning] we gave much importance to the ideological and political line. Later it became less important, but at that time we had many discussions on theoretical and political issues and about what was requested as prerequisites for the unity, such as, for instance, ideological and political affinity. We then minimised the criteria for achieving unity and we ended up discussing pragmatic programmes, such as how to get into government. (Author Interview, 2013)

Driven by its growing pragmatism, the PRT started to build strong ties with the M-19⁷ and participated in every guerrilla coordination board during the 1980s (Hérendez 1993). On the one hand initiatives such as the *Trilateral*, the National Guerrilla Coordinating Board (*Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera* – CNG) and the Simon Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Board (*Coordinadora Guerrillera Simon Bolívar* – CGSB) intended to unite the guerrilla forces in order to maximise their military impact, to increase the pressure on the government and thereby destabilise the elites' hegemony. On the other hand, the PRT internally perceived the collective approach and the related knowledge transfer as a possible solution to its internal limitations. In order to strengthen its own capacities, the PRT even participated in military trainings of the CGSB and the America Battalion⁸ (Focus Group Discussion, 2014c).

2.1 Ideological Shift and Peace Negotiations

Since their creation, all Colombian guerrilla groups lived in what Zuluaga (1999) called an “epoch of utopias, in which the dream about a future and inevitable superior society justified violent means”. Revolution was perceived as inevitable and irreversible. Nevertheless, during the 1980s this revolutionary world-view entered a state of crisis, prompted by other experiences on the international scene, which demonstrated that revolutions were evitable, and that when they occurred, their outcome was not as perfect as had been imagined and could be reversed. The PRT met such a fate – over the years its ideology, overall strategy and goals underwent a significant evolution. This ideological shift was attributable to the party's re-evaluation of the national and international context and the condition of the revolutionary left.

6 By the end of the 1970s, the Tmlm founded the Committee for the Unity of the Marxists and Leninists (*Comité por la Unidad de los Marxistas Leninistas*, CPU) which was intended to have the task of seeking the unity of the Maoist-oriented revolutionary Left (Nuñez 1992).

7 According to Flórez (Author Interview, 2014), at one time, M-19 commander Carlos Pizarro offered the PRT to integrate the M-19. This proposal was rejected by the PRT Secretariat because of tactical differences regarding the role of the armed struggle. The PRT particularly criticised the M-19's primary focus on armed propaganda.

8 Composed of national and international guerrilla fighters, the America Battalion was the M-19's attempt to create a Pan-American armed movement.

On the one hand, the PRT gradually deviated from the Maoist “all-or-nothing” approach towards a re-assessment of the possibility to reform the exclusive state and to establish political pluralism. Its overall goal thus shifted from the destruction of the existing regime and the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat on the ashes of the former, towards favouring a democratic opening.⁹ While democracy had earlier been understood, according to a Maoist approximation of the concept, in a socio-economic rather than political sense,¹⁰ the PRT now called for a democratic political settlement that would guarantee the right to freely participate in public political discussions and state and governance decision-making processes. Political pluralism, an effective system of checks and balances, decentralisation, the recognition of the multicultural and multi-ethnic character of the Colombian state, and the protection of civil liberties and political rights, became essential elements of the claims for a new order. Furthermore, at the end of the 1980s, the party began to demand a “mixed economy”, replacing its old demands for planned economy. Although the new demands still entailed state control over key economic sectors such as water, energy, and the banking sector, nationalisation was no longer regarded as panacea *per se* (Viraje 1990, 35) and under certain conditions, the co-existence of private property and state property was considered acceptable (Viraje 1990; Falla, Author Interview, 2014, Urueta, Author Interview, 2014a).

According to Flórez (2014) and Falla (2014) – both of them former members of PRT’s National Directorate, the shift of goals was mainly grounded in personal experiences that the party members had gained from traveling abroad. After his trip to Cuba, Falla began to criticise repression of divergent opinions under the Castro regime and instead stressed the importance of political and cultural pluralism. Flórez, to some extent, changed his idealistic vision of Cuba and Libya after having experienced the unvarnished realities in the respective countries. The economic crisis that Cuba suffered after the Soviet Union’s withdrawal of financial support had triggered second thoughts about the true face of real socialism (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014).

The gradual change of the PRT’s objectives went hand-in-hand with the evolution of the party’s strategy. As the new goals no longer required the total destruction of the old political order but could be achieved through reforms within the existing political system, legal participation progressively became seen as a viable strategy, while armed struggle became less important.

This re-orientation was also influenced by a series of national and international developments in the late 1980s. The PRT’s participation in the first CGSB conference made them realise that the cooperative approach had limitations. Contrary to their expectations, the Coordination Board was not able to overcome internal divergences of opinions among its members, nor did it manage to create truly unified action. Throughout the CGSB’s existence, its military impact remained limited – a fact which forced some of its participants to admit that the Colombian revolutionary left, after almost three decades of violent revolutionary struggle, had caused less damage to the regime than the Medellin drug cartel in just a matter of a few years (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014). Along with continuous financial limitation which prevented the strengthening of the party’s military capacities, this realisation led to the conclusion that the “prospect of a victory through a military defeat [of the enemy] did not exist” (Viraje 1990, 48). As Del Rio opines:

We were a small group without the military capacity to achieve our ideal of taking state power by force. We also saw that [...] the other guerrilla groups were also far from doing so. [In addition] one already started talking about the popular election of mayors. In this situation, I was convinced even more that this [the armed struggle] had no future. One could last long by doing marginal things, [...] subsisting from a military point of view, but all that was never going to lead us to reach our goals. (Author Interview, 2014a)

Furthermore, the PRT witnessed an increased loss of legitimacy of the armed struggle, both within the Colombian society and within its own ranks. Becoming caught in the crossfire amidst the escalating conflict between the Colombian state and the Medellin drug cartel, and confronted with a growing number of both paramilitary and guerrilla attacks against politicians and civil society leaders, many Colombians called for an end to violence. Moreover, guerrilla practices of kidnapping and blackmailing, reports about cruel internal guerrilla violence such as the Tacueyó

⁹ The concept of democratic opening (*apertura democrática*) refers to political reforms aiming for more inclusive decision-making processes.

¹⁰ From a Maoist perspective, “democracy” is understood as the satisfaction of basic needs rather than as the guarantee of political rights and the possibility to participate in decision-making (Archila 2008).

massacre,¹¹ and rumours about connections between some insurgent groups and the drug cartels, destroyed to some extent the romanticised idea of guerrilla war, which at that time still existed within some sectors of society (Fernández, Author Interview, 2014; Urueta, Author Interview, 2014a). In this context, internal criticism of the PRT's practices of bank robberies and kidnappings also grew (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a). Steadily becoming more evident, the public fatigue of war influenced PRT's internal discussions and evaluations of the national reality, as former National Directorate member, Ernesto Falla (Author Interview, 2014), recalls:

No, Colombia could not take more. We could not go on being the fuel of the Colombian war. We already had enough violence because of the drug cartels, the paramilitary, the army, the police and the guerrillas. It was because of that that we could not go on fuelling the war. We rather had to put an end to the war.

Besides these evaluations of the national context, especially the progress of the El Salvadorian peace negotiation process between the government and the FMNL encouraged the PRT's recognition of negotiated solutions as a viable strategic option (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014).

With its new strategic orientation and goals, the PRT slowly became receptive to the possibility of negotiating with the government, a new attitude that since 1989 was strongly supported by two additional evaluations the party made of the Colombian reality of the time: the M-19's relative success in legal politics, and the window of opportunity that was opened by the upcoming elections for the National Constituent Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional Constituyente* – ANC).¹²

In early 1989, the M-19 broke with the CGSB and unilaterally entered into negotiations with the national government under President Barco. The negotiations were formalised through a first joint declaration by the government and the M-19 on 10 January 1989. After its subsequent demobilisation in 1990, the former guerrilla not only received significant public support, it also successfully participated in legal politics. Besides some political offices at the local level, the organisation gained two seats in the House of Representatives in the elections of March 1990, only two days after its demobilisation.¹³ In PRT's perception, the M-19's journey marked an overall positive environment for demobilised insurgent groups. Electoral success, and thereby a true participation in politics, seemed to be within reach (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014).

Moreover, towards the end of the 1980s, the PRT began to acknowledge that the bourgeoisie was not as homogeneous as previously assumed, and that some of its sectors were open for change. Although the possibility to form alliances with the elites had earlier been categorically ruled out by the PRT, its evaluation of President Barco's (failed) attempt to reform the constitution, and later, the support for the ANC from some traditional politicians was now regarded as a possible starting point for changes within the existing political system. In this new context, a re-negotiation of the political settlement seemed to be a viable option, and the ANC the right tool to do so (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014; Viraje 1990).

After initially having promoted a joint negotiation of all members of the CGSB with the Barco administration (García 1992), the PRT was now concerned with the increasing dominance of the FARC and the gradual radicalisation of the coordination board after the splitting of the M-19. In reaction to the government's rejection of the FARC's peace proposals, at its 5th summit in April 1990 the CGSB shifted its focus back to the armed struggle, which provoked an internal division within the coordination. The FARC and ELN opted for categorically rejecting peace negotiations with President Barco, while the EPL/PCC-ML, MAQL and the PRT continued to insist on the viability of a negotiated solution to the conflict (Villarraga 2009).

According to the latter group, the ANC provided an opportunity to re-negotiate the exclusive political settlement via an inclusive national pact and was therefore seen to be worth being promoted by all organisations of the Colombian revolutionary Left, including themselves. For its part, the PRT championed the ANC by writing various letters expressing their full support for the constitutional process as a historical opportunity, addressing the government, civil society, and political party leaders (PRT 1990a; 1990b).

¹¹ During the so-called Tacueyó massacre in 1985, 164 members of the *Frente Ricardo Franco*, a dissident group of the FARC, were assassinated by their own commanders after being accused of being army infiltrators.

¹² To read more about the M-19's experience and the ANC, see Rampf and Chavarro (2014).

¹³ Vera Grabe with a total of 31,147 votes and Nelson Campo Núñez with 18,679 votes (Dirección General para la Reinserción 2000).

After some initial talks between the EPL/PCC-ML and the government, a joint public declaration was made on 4 June 1990, declaring the beginning of the peace talks between the EPL, the MAQL, the PRT and the government (Gobierno Nacional, EPL, MAQL and PRT 1990). For its part, the PRT signed two months later, after a reunion with government representatives in La Haya, an agreement defining the terms and agenda for its posterior peace negotiations (PRT 1990c). The party assembled a large part of its members in the negotiation camp in La Haya, which in October of the same year was moved to Don Gabriel in order to guarantee easier access for civil society, media and politicians interested in joining the talks. Going against the arguments put forward by an internal opposition from, among others, the Antioquia and Nariño regional fraction, the party's secretariat had already decided to seriously seek a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and to get the most out of the historic political window of opportunity that had been made available by the ANC. According to Flórez (2014),¹⁴ President Barco's successor, the newly elected president César Gaviria, was keen to show quick results by linking as many insurgent groups as possible to the list of participants in the ANC.

In spite of its self-understanding as a clandestine party of national scope and despite the character of the peace negotiations with the national government as a principal counterpart, the PRT right from the start of the dialogues stressed the importance of a regional approach to (at least a part of) the future peace agreement. According to this approach, the preliminary La Haya agreement already included development plans for the areas of influence in the agenda of the dialogues. However, while the PRT tried to implement its regional approach by bringing local mayors' requests to the negotiation table and convening a regional peace summit in November 1990 to seek dialogue with other local actors,¹⁵ the national government opposed a direct involvement of local authorities in the negotiation (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014b). As a result, the regional elites were absent from the talks; for several interviewees, this represented yet another lost opportunity to resolve historical conflicts in the Montes de María province in general, and to seek reconciliation between landowners and the peasant movement (Barrios, Author Interview, 2014; Flórez, Author Interview, 2014b).

If these regional elites would have really wanted to solve the problem [...], financial support from the government would not have been necessary. The elites and the population would have been able to design and implement joint projects to solve the social situation in many areas. [...] But that was one of the biggest deficits of the process: there was no real reconciliation process allowing for the elites to participate together with the sectors that had been excluded from power. (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014b)

Together with issues related to the Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process, security guarantees, general amnesty for demobilised PRT members, and specific measures to promote human rights and regional development at the Caribbean coast,¹⁶ political participation became one of the main issues of the negotiation process.¹⁷ On the one hand, the PRT claimed direct representation in the ANC, which it perceived positively as "the stage for achieving a political and social pact for attaining great democratic, economic and social changes the country needs, without which it would be impossible to think of stable and lasting peace" (PRT 1990d). On the other hand, the party demanded governmental assistance for the launch of its own political project pending demobilisation. Besides claiming financial support and access to media, the PRT repeatedly requested state measures to establish a political environment conducive to the foundation and growth of new and alternative political parties.

14 Particularly low-ranking interviewees retrospectively criticise the top-down way in which the decision to lay down arms had been made. For his part, peasant leader and former PRT member, Gabriel Barrios, (Author Interview, 2014) critically stresses the lack of alignment with the party's constituency.

15 According to Flórez (Author Interview, 2014b), many mayors of the area primarily regarded the peace negotiation as a possibility to enter into direct dialogue with the national government. Rather than being interested in the actual solution of the armed conflict, they sought a way to express their non-conformity with the development plan for the Caribbean coastal region which was designed without their participation by the government in order to demand additional financial support for their municipalities as, for instance, a joint declaration of 15 August 1990 demonstrated (PRT 1990c). The regional peace summit, for its part, aimed to "open a space of mutual approach and dialogue in the [Montes de María] region". (El Heraldo 1990)

16 Although PRT members of the Cauca region are not found in the official demobilisation list due to security issues at the time, a number of municipalities nevertheless received some financial assistance out of the National Peace Fund (Flórez, Author Interview, 2014).

17 As in the parallel peace negotiations of the EPL and MAQL with the government, the issue of substantial political reforms was postponed to be addressed at the ANC (Villarraga 2013).

These issues were given prominence in the final Peace Agreement signed on 25 January 1991. While the first article of the Peace Agreement granted the PRT the right to send one delegate to the ANC (although without the right to vote),¹⁸ articles 2 to 5 defined state support for the transformation of the PRT into a legal political party, particularly in two ways: First, facilitation of the party's legal recognition, and financial support directed to public promotion of the new political party. Second, and following the M-19 experience, the agreement included (besides announcements in the national and regional media) the installation of five so-called *casas de la vida* (houses of life) in different cities of the country in order to enable an exchange of ideas between the party and Colombian society (PRT 1991).

The day after the negotiations had been brought to an end and during a festive ceremony in Cartagena, the majority of the PRT members¹⁹ finally closed the chapter of their armed struggle and literally threw their weapons into the Caribbean Sea.

2.2 Entering National and Regional Politics: The PRT's Democratic Spring

2.2.1 Changing arms for political offices: The party's participation in elections

Just as the internal discussion about the possibility of a negotiated solution was limited, so were the reflections about the party's future in legal politics and its role in the post-demobilisation society. Despite an overall internal consensus which stressed the importance of political participation in general, there were two somewhat dissimilar positions about the focus of the legal party's future. While some former members (mainly of the party's former National Directorate) focused primarily on constitutional changes and an overall transformation of the country – a goal that should have been achieved through participation in national politics and the ANC – others sought solutions to current problems at the local level by actively influencing regional policy. Participation in local level governments sought to improve access to public services (education, health, public utilities) for the PRT's local constituencies and enable the implementation of land reforms (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a; Zambrano, Author Interview, 2014). As a result, the different positions about what to do in the aftermath of the demobilisation defined two different approaches, which fostered a gradual division between the former leaders of the party and its low-ranking members and constituency - in particular those stemming from the Caribbean coastal region.

The supporters of the national approach regarded both the accession of the PRT to the Democratic Alliance M-19 (*Alianza Democrática M-19*, ADM-19)²⁰ and the close coordination of José Matías Ortiz, the PRT's delegate to the ANC, with the ANC faction led by the ADM-19 leader Antonio Navarro Wolff, to be the next logical step. Although the Peace Agreement and several declarations made by PRT spokesmen during the negotiation process may suggest that there was a clear idea of transforming the PRT into an independent political party which would somehow conserve its own identity (El Tiempo 1991; PRT 1991), these decisions clearly represented a continuation of the PRT's course – one which was already set before the demobilisation. While the postulated objective of the ADM-19 (the creation of a unified national movement of left-wing and reformist Colombian political forces) matched the PRT's original claim for unity, the decision to join the alliance also represented a continuation of the party's close engagement with *Colombia Unida* (Unified Colombia), a founding member of the ADM-19. In a letter dated 15 April 1990 to several leaders of social movements and parties that would later found the ADM-19, the PRT expressed both its support for the emerging new political movement and interest in accompanying the initiative as an observer (PRT 1990a). Moreover, entering the

18 According to Flórez (Author Interview, 2013), the governmental decision to grant the two smaller guerrilla groups, namely the PRT and the MAQL, only the right to argue but not to vote in the ANC, reflected President Gaviria's fear that the ANC could become dominated by insurgent groups, as judged by the ADM-19's overwhelming success in opinion polls before the ANC election.

19 By opposing the party's peace negotiations, some minority parts of the PRT who rejected demobilisation continued their armed struggle, albeit with very limited impact in their respective regions.

20 The ADM-19 was a political party that sought to integrate left-wing movements, including demobilised guerrilla groups, and reformist sectors of traditional parties. For more information about the party's initial success and overall failure see Rampf and Chavarro (2014).

ADM-19 was to some extent perceived as a pragmatic step, due to the overwhelming success the new party had gained in the ANC elections of December 1990 (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a; Flórez, Author Interview, 2013a).²¹

For their part, many PRT supporters of the aforementioned regional approach to peace were concerned about the risk of losing their common identity as an organisation and their link to the party’s constituency as a result of dissolving the PRT into the ADM-19. Although they did not oppose the PRT’s accession to the ADM-19 and, in spite of the fact that the majority of former PRT members ran for local elections as ADM-19 candidates, many of them nevertheless went on identifying themselves as PRT and even led campaigns under the banner of the demobilised party (Barrios, Author Interview, 2014; Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014). For example, the former city counsellor of Barranquilla and PRT member Jorge Urueta highlights: “We ran for elections in the name of the PRT, but officially I became elected city counsellor as a representative for the ADM-19. However it was still obvious to everyone that I was still part of the PRT” (Author Interview, 2014a).

After its demobilisation, the PRT managed to achieve a meaningful participation in politics at the national as well as at the regional level, and experienced what Flórez (Author Interview, 2014) calls its “democratic spring”. Several former members of the party (such as Flórez, Fernández and Ortiz) gained some influence within the ADM-19 and participated in its electoral lists for Congress: they also successfully defended the PRT agenda in the ANC and positioned key issues in the new Constitution of 1991, such as the decentralisation of political authority (Ortiz, Author Interview, 2014). In 1994, Ortiz furthermore gained a seat in Senate, although not as part of the ADM-19 electoral list.

At the regional level of the Northern provinces of Atlántico, Bolívar and Sucre, former members of the PRT achieved considerable results in the municipal elections of 1992 and 1994. Most prominently, Raúl Enrique Tovar Barreto was elected mayor of Chalán (Sucre) – the only successful ADM-19 candidate in the mayoral elections of March 1992 (*Dirección general para la reinserción* 2000).²² In the same elections, a further four demobilised PRT members entered the city councils of three municipalities of the Provinces of Atlántico and Sucre as candidates of the ADM-19, including Reinaldo Rivas (alias “Pablo”), a former regional PRT military commander. Two years later, seven party veterans gained seats in diverse city councils of the region – four of them within the scope of the one-time special electorate constituency reserved for demobilised insurgents.

Table 1: Former PRT members elected for City Council in 1992 and 1994

City Council Elections of 1992		
Castañada, Pedro	Galapa / Atlántico	ADM-19
Esmeral, José	Malambo / Atlántico	ADM-19
Pizarro, Jaime	Ovejas / Sucre	ADM-19
Rivas, Reinaldo	Ovejas / Sucre	ADM-19
City Council Elections of 1994		
Barrios, Gabriel*	San Juan de Nepomuceno / Bolívar	
Esmeral, José*	Malambo / Atlántico	ADM-19
Medrano, Never	Colosó / Sucre	ADM-19
Robles, Cesar	Colosó / Sucre	
Tovar, Eberto	Colosó / Sucre	
Urueta, Jorge*	Barranquilla / Atlántico	ADM-19
Zambrano, Carlos*	Baranoa / Atlántico	ADM-19

*Special electorate constituency

²¹ The ADM-19 won 26.7% in the ANC elections.

²² The party participated with 87 candidates in the election.

On some occasions, demobilised PRT members also publicly supported the electoral campaigns of other ADM-19 party members or independent candidates (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a).

2.2.2 Another way of making a difference: The social work of CORPADEC

In addition to their direct participation in politics, demobilised PRT members also found another way to fulfil the diverse expectations of its members, particularly at the regional level. Just like the other demobilised insurgent groups, and as encouraged by the national government, the PRT founded its own NGO called the Corporation for Peace and Community Development (*Corporación para la Paz y el Desarrollo Comunitario*, CORPADEC) in order to administer the resources assigned to the reintegration process. During the following decade, this organisation did not only serve the interests of demobilised members, but it also understood its mission in a wider sense, namely the promotion and implementation of “social development projects, contributing to the improvement of society’s quality of life, a generation of participatory processes and the consolidation of democracy in Colombia” (CORPADEC 1998, 2). In line with that mission, and by focusing not only on former members of the PRT as beneficiaries but also on the whole population of its areas of influence, CORPADEC became a tool to maintain the link between the PRT and its former constituencies in order to increase its influence in the region and to make political capital out of it (CORPADEC 2000; Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014b).²³

We grew with CORPADEC [...]. When we conducted the negotiations with the government, we had some influence over society, but later, with CORPADEC, we managed to increase this influence. We reached more sectors of society [...] that had not been part of the PRT but accepted our leadership. (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014b)

Following its mission, CORPADEC implemented, mostly in the Caribbean coastal region,²⁴ state-financed projects aimed at developing the capacities of community leaders. It places a particular emphasis on socialising the values of civil rights and peace and seeking the transformation of the exclusive and often violent Colombian political culture. Particularly the *ciudadelas para la paz* – a project promoted by former PRT member Hector Rivas – created considerable impact in the region, building hundreds of council houses in the municipalities of Carmen de Bolívar, Cartagena, and San Juan de Nepomuceno, among others (Arrieta 2006; Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014b).

2.3 A Failed Political Project? The Role of the ADM-19 and the Reaction of Regional Elites

Despite the promising success that CORPADEC and former party members achieved during the first years after their return to civilian life, the overall assessment drawn by movement veterans is largely negative. Even though the demobilised group recognised in 1998 that the “Constitution of 1991 created the legal basis and instruments to advance towards the democratisation of the country”, it also argued that “the political plurality [...] and the profusion of civil movements, [...] as always, had gotten absorbed by the same political hegemony [of the elites]” (CORPADEC 1998). From the point of view of many interviewees, two main factors contributed to this negative assessment: First, the centralised structure and overall national approach of the ADM-19, and second, the hostile context facing many left-wing political protagonists (including CORPADEC) at the regional level.

On the one hand, according to former promoters of the party’s political project at the regional level (such as Astolfo, Barrios and Del Rio), the decision to join the ADM-19 brought with it the obligation to follow internal decisions and guidelines often taken at the national level. This was seen as an impediment rather than a supportive measure. The ADM-19 leader’s neglect or ignorance of the regional context as well as of the traditional, faithful local constituencies of the PRT and other members of the political alliance, and the party’s vertical top-down structure (which obstructed a

²³ In addition, in some cases, CORPADEC provided financial support to the electoral campaign of former PRT members (Urueta, Author Interview, 2014a).

²⁴ Although the projects were located mainly in the Caribbean coastal region, CORPADEC also ran offices in Cali and Pasto.

genuine participation of the regions in internal decision-making processes),²⁵ led them to take strongly contested decisions affecting the former PRT member's political project at the regional level. Some interviewees highlight, for instance, examples in which PRT candidates with a good reputation in the region had to compete for their position on the party's electoral list with largely unknown candidates who were appointed directly by the ADM-19 leader Navarro (Astolfo, Author Interview, 2014; Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a). Barrios (Author Interview, 2014) even remembers a meeting between Navarro and members of the traditional elite, who were well-known promoters of a regional paramilitary group, that sought to establish an electoral alliance in San Juan de Nepomuceno.

For their part, former PRT members who stood close to the ADM-19 National Directorate (such as Flórez and Ortiz) failed to support the regional political project of their former comrades – a fact that further enhanced the division between low-ranking members of the PRT and their previous leaders who, in the perception of the former group “let its constituencies become orphaned in terms of political leadership” (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a).²⁶ In this sense, the gained participation in national politics neither managed to support the political project at the regional level nor did it manage to promote the NGO. As an example Del Rio stresses that “when [former party member] Matías was Senator, he was not a Senator who opened doors for us in the Senate. [...] They [national leaders in the Senate] did not use the Senate to consolidate our political ideas” (Del Rio, Author Interview, 2014a).

On the other hand and more strongly since 1994, the participation of former PRT members in regional politics through the ADM-19, other movements or CORPADEC, were clearly affected by the hostile political environment in the Caribbean coastal region, which during the 1990s maintained and even reinforced its traditional patterns of (violent) political and socio-economic exclusion of the sectors which threatened the regional elite's political and economic hegemony. Especially since the late 1960s and 1970s and as a reaction to a radical stance of the so-called *Sincelejo* Line (*Línea Sincelejo*) of the ANUC, which demanded better living conditions for peasants and access to land, the regional elites' fear of losing their economic and political privileges led to the use of violent means in order to maintain the status quo (Gonzalez 2014; Porras 2014).

In consequence, parts of the regional elite promoted the creation of small armed groups to respond to land occupations – frequently led by the ANUC – and for conducting the assassination of peasant leaders in order to break up their movements. Particularly in the context of the political decentralisation process of the late 1980s and the rise of the new legal party Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica*, UP),²⁷ this development assumed new dimensions due to an growing alliance between traditional landowners, politicians of the region, some fractions of the army and a new actor, namely the drug cartels, who gradually became important landowners and thereby also part of the regional elites. Although traditional regional elites were involved in the rise of paramilitary groups in almost all regions of the country, the mentioned alliance was particularly strong in the northern provinces of Bolívar, Córdoba, and Sucre (and in the Caribbean coast in general), where some of the traditional members of the elites not only financed and benefited from paramilitary actions, but also became part of paramilitary structures themselves (González 2014; Verdad Abierta n.d. a).

In this context, and despite the series of public announcements by regional politicians, such as Sucre Governor Luz Mariana Ojeda de Pinto, signalling a general disposition of some parts of the regional elite to welcome the demobilised PRT in civil life (El Tiempo 1991), the promoters of the legal political project of the PRT and their families found themselves at the centre of a violent campaign against all demobilised insurgent groups of the region, resulting in their displacement from rural to urban areas, as former PRT member Robison Arrieta (2006) recalls. Many former PRT members that had been elected to political offices in 1992 and 1994, as well as promoters of CORPADEC projects and other party sympathisers, received death threats and had to either leave the region or were murdered by paramilitary groups. In a declaration submitted to the Victim's Summit in Barranquilla, a delegation of former PRT members led by Flórez and Urueta, listed 61 cases of assassinated comrades just in the Northern provinces of Atlántico, Bolívar, Magdalena, and Sucre. The list included the former mayor of Chalán (Raúl Tovar) and his two brothers, as well as a

25 According to Fernández (Author Interview, 2014), inside the ADM-19, the authoritarian style of Navarro's leadership prevailed. He always had the final say in deciding on the party's direction. In addition, because of the hegemony of the former M-19 commander, who clearly favoured a national project and tended to disregard the distinct features of the regions, Ortiz decided to finally leave the alliance and go back to Barranquilla (Author Interview, 2014).

26 For his part, Flórez (Author Interview, 2014) stresses the insistence with which he tried vehemently, but mostly in vain, to influence Navarro's decision in favour of regional projects.

27 The Patriotic Union emerged from the peace talks between the FARC and the government in 1984, to enable FARC members to participate in civic political life. It has won substantial electoral victories since 1986 (Villarraga 2013, 30).

former city councillor (Reinaldo Rivas) and his nephew (Hector Rivas), who was also the promoter of CORPADEC (PRT 2014).

Many interviewees retrospectively identify these traumatic events as an “extermination policy” (Astolfo, Author Interview, 2014) or “genocide” (CORPADEC 2000; PRT 2014; Urueta, Author Interview, 2014a), designed by the regional elites and implemented by paramilitary groups – an interpretation supported by a series of legal confessions by former paramilitary commanders from the provinces of Sucre and Bolivar, such as Javier (Verdad Abierta n.d. b). As explained by Del Rio:

We caused the elites of Sucre some concerns. [...] So the political class of Sucre undertook some analysis. [...] And with its low political culture, without being able to accept pluralism and the emergence of new political forces, as well as with strong ties to corruption, [...] it saw that its interests could be threatened if this phenomenon [the PRT's political project] grew. Therefore, this political class started to build up an alliance with paramilitary groups. (Author Interview, 2014a)

Although this violent response against the upcoming new political force followed to some extent the traditional patterns of exclusion, for many interviewees its dimension was unexpected (Focus Group Discussion, 2014a). Falla, for instance, admits that:

[The party] overestimated the political momentum of the Constituent Assembly, assuming that it was something national, just as democracy is. We forgot that the local and regional level has its own characteristics that do not follow national logic. Well, at the time when the paramilitary attacks and the assassinations of companions started and we were chucked out of the Montes de Maria region, we were caught off-guard (Author Interview, 2014).

Falla implicitly raises the question about the role of the national government, which failed to intervene in support of the rule of law, in spite of the fact that the security issues and guarantees had been important agenda points of the negotiation. From the point of view of the former PRT, the response of the state had always been “weak” (CORPADEC 2000) – Arrieta (2006) even speaks of a governmental breach of the agreements. The group thereby concurred with the conclusion of a conference attended by all NGOs born out of the demobilisation processes of the 1990s, which highlighted, aside from a “serious state and governmental failure to guarantee security”, the assessment that “faced with the registered violations [of human rights], the state did not carry out its duty, did not provide sufficient security, but rather permitted the local rule of diverse armed groups” (Fucude and Asopropaz 2006, 361).

Other interviewees go even further and stress not only the absence of state support, but point directly to state agents involved in the violent campaign (Urueta, Author Interview, 2014a) – an accusation that is now even supported through the legal confessions of demobilised paramilitary members (El Tiempo 2008) and academics (Villarraga 2006).

In sum, the violent campaign against demobilised members of the PRT and other insurgent groups revealed the limitations of the governmental reinsertion programme of the 1990s, especially of its security programme. By concentrating mainly on the most publicly visible leaders of the CRS, EPL, M-19, MAQL and PRT, both their constituencies and low-ranking members, often stigmatised either as supporters of the guerrilla (by the army and paramilitary) or as traitors of the revolution (by the ELN and FARC), have been left unprotected. Although the national government, affected by the political crisis of the mid 1990s²⁸ and drawn even further into the escalating armed conflict with the remaining guerrilla groups, generally respected the agreements and accepted the denunciations, this situation did not bring about a readjustment of the programme (Villarraga 2006). Even though members of the former PRT, as established in the Peace Agreement, could participate in national and regional elections with financial support for their campaigns and NGOs and without legal restrictions, in the reality of provinces such as Bolivar and Sucre, with their (violent) and exclusive political culture promoted by a regional elite, political participation rather became a danger to life than the desired key to fight social injustice and political exclusion.

²⁸ At this time, President Ernesto Samper faced a huge legitimacy crisis related to (later proven) accusations that his presidential campaign had been partially financed by drug money.

3 Conclusion

Although the orientation of insurgent groups is generally focused on the national level, their constituencies, areas of operation and hence their impact, is often limited to the regional level. Nevertheless, and mostly because of their national motivation, peace negotiations typically focus on the national government as a counterpart of dialogue. Whether this design rests in the insurgent group's own decision or is dictated by a national government, such a design often fails to take into account the characteristics, patterns and power relations of the regions – a fact that may ultimately complicate broad acceptance of the eventually reached agreement. Such circumstances may also lead to implementation problems and cause an excluded actors' rejection – in sum: It may lead to incomplete peace.

The case of the PRT is one of the best examples of the above. While the party attempted to include specific regional issues (of the Caribbean coastal region) in the agenda, and to link local authorities to the process, the rejection of its proposal by the national government, together with the lack of interest of the same regional elites, finally prevented the transformation of the peace talks into a reconciliation process between the traditionally excluded and exclusive elites. For many interviewees of the PRT it is thereby clear that this limitation, among other factors, led to the violent campaign against demobilised members of the party, ordered and led by the traditional elites. These campaigns hindered the implementation of the agreements and thus destroyed the possibility for sustainable peace. For this reason, former PRT leader Flórez (Author Interview, 2014b) views the peace process between the PRT and the national government as a missed opportunity to include factors and actors of the regional level, as they represent the key to a successful implementation of peace and democracy.

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- Barrios, Gabriel** (Former ANUC and PRT member, city councillor of San Juan de Nepomuceno), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 10 February 2014.
- Camilo** (Former PRT and ENO member), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 27 June 2014.
- Cuello, Rafael** (Former PRT member and unionist), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 9 July 2014.
- Del Rio, Fernando** (Former PRT member and director of CORPADEC), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 18 June 2014 and 29 July 2014.
- Falla, Ernesto** (Former high-ranking PRT member and spokesman during the peace negotiations), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 10 February 2014.
- Fernández, Arcecio** (Former high-ranking PRT member), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 11 July 2014.
- Flórez, Enrique** (Former high-ranking PRT member and negotiator, ADM-19 candidate for Senate), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 12 November 2013, 25 July 2014 and 1 August 2014.
- Ortiz, José Matías** (Former PRT commander, ANC delegate, Senator), Personal interview by Diana Chavarro. Barranquilla, Colombia, 21 February 2014.
- Tobón, Gabriel** (Former high-ranking PRT member), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 10 July 2014.
- Urueta, Jorge** (Former PRT member and city councilor of Barranquilla), Personal interview by author. Bogotá, Colombia, 14 February 2014 and 1 August 2014.
- Zambrano, Carlos** (former PRT member, city councillor and mayor), Personal interview by Diana Chavarro. Baranoa, Colombia, 21 February 2014.

Focus Group Discussions

- Focus Group Discussion 2014a.** 8 February 2014, Bogotá, Colombia.
- Focus Group Discussion 2014b.** 17 February 2014, Ovejas, Colombia.
- Focus Group Discussion 2014c.** 24 May 2014, Bogotá, Colombia.