

# *Venezuela Demands Rightful Recognition in MERCOSUR Bloc*

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Montevideo, February 10 (RHC)-- Venezuela demanded Thursday that the MERCOSUR regional trading bloc recognizes its membership in the body, after what the country calls an attempt by the "Triple Alliance" of right-wing governments of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay to suspend it.

Hector Constant, the Venezuelan national coordinator for MERCOSUR, spoke before he entered a dispute settlement meeting organized by the bloc in Montevideo, Uruguay. Constant said Venezuela invoked the Olives Protocol in full exercise of its rights as a member state to continue analyzing the dispute with the other countries.

The official said Venezuela has taken steps to remedy the situation "because of the enormous arbitrariness that has characterized these states in their relationship with Venezuela, ignoring its status as a member state, ignoring its pro-tempore presidency last semester adjusted to the norms." He added that the country aims to "keep all channels of dialogue open through direct negotiation so that we can reach a resolution."

Argentina currently holds the leadership of MERCOSUR for the first six months of 2017 before it will be taken over by Brazil. Both have led, along with Paraguay, the push for Venezuela's expulsion from the trading bloc, which Caracas maintains is a right-wing led coup that ignores the fact that the country has been adhering to the bloc's regulations.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez defended the country's role in the regional economic bloc, maintaining that the country has satisfied 95 percent of the norms and arguing that the country's critics had sought to destabilize President Nicolas Maduro's government with a suspension from MERCOSUR.

Since Venezuela joined MERCOSUR in August 2012, it has worked to add more voices and representation in the bloc, incorporating workers, Afro-descendants and Indigenous people into the body. Since then, the country has assumed the group's rotating presidency twice.

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