

# 11 EU NATIONS BACK GUAIDO AS PRESIDENT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Eleven European nations joined the U.S. in recognising opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim President on Monday, heightening a global showdown over Nicolas Maduro's socialist rule.

The EU members' coordinated move followed the expiry of an ultimatum for Mr. Maduro to call a new election and aligned them with Washington against Russia and China.

The sitting Venezuelan leader has defied European heads of state and called them sycophants for following President Donald Trump.

Mr. Guaido, who leads the National Assembly, declared himself caretaker leader last month in a move that has fed into a global geopolitical divide and brought Venezuelans onto the streets. Mr. Trump quickly recognised him, but Europe had been hesitant.

"From today, we will spare no effort in helping all Venezuelans achieve freedom, prosperity and harmony," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said, recognising Mr. Guaido.

Another 10 EU nations followed suit: Austria, Britain, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden.

In response, Caracas said it would revise its relations with Europe, while Mr. Maduro singled out "cowardly" Spain. "If one day, there is a coup, if one day there is a gringo military intervention, your hands will be stained with blood, Mr. Pedro Sanchez," he said in a speech.

Mr. Maduro, 56, a former union leader, bus driver and Foreign Minister, replaced former President Hugo Chavez in 2013 after his death from cancer. But he has presided over an economic collapse and exodus of 3 million Venezuelans.

He accuses Washington of waging "economic war" on Venezuela and harbouring coup pretensions aimed at gaining control over its oil. Venezuela's oil reserves are the largest in the world but production has plunged under Mr. Maduro.

## Incompetent policies

Critics say incompetent policies and corruption have impoverished the once-wealthy nation while dissent has been brutally crushed. "The oppression of the illegitimate, kleptocratic Maduro regime must end," said British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt. Moscow and Beijing, which have poured billions of dollars of investment and loans into Venezuela, are supporting Mr. Maduro and warning of the dangers of foreign intervention.

"Imposing some kind of decisions or trying to legitimise an attempt to usurp power is both direct and indirect interference," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Mr. Maduro won re-election last year, but critics say the vote was a sham. Two opposition rivals with a good chance of winning were barred, while food handouts to hungry Venezuelans were linked with political support.

Italy, whose coalition government is divided over Venezuela, dissented from other major European powers and blocked a joint statement, saying that individual nations had the prerogative to recognise Mr. Guaido. Italy's 5-Star Movement says it cannot recognise self-appointed leaders.

Ireland shared that reluctance and declined to recognise Mr. Guaido specifically.

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