

Forum: General Assembly 4

Issue: The situation in Venezuela

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Introduction

Venezuela was a prominent country in South America, becoming one of the richest and having a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Venezuela is currently in an economic crisis as the government has to deal with major issues such as hyperinflation, corruption, unemployment and increased crime rates. Due to the current failure to improve conditions and the worsening economy, thousands of citizens are leaving the country for better opportunities.



Maduro's administration received a country on the brink of this economic crisis due to Hugo Chavez's, Maduro's predecessor, established a government with high spending on social programs with over 30 social reforms. The overspending of the government was done as a populist stunt in order for Chavez to get public fame from the citizens of Venezuela. Venezuela's national income is solely dependent on oil as it takes up almost all of the exports.

However, oil prices can vary easily, giving many years of success such as during Chavez's rule or can suddenly drop like for Maduro. President Maduro took office in 2013 after Hugo Chavez's death, continuing with a similar government which encompassed overspending on social programs, high corruption of government officials, and the absence of national monetary reserves to stabilize the economy. Chávez also establish a socialist system of subsidies in Venezuela and price controls on products and oil.

A solution the government chose was to print money in order to subsidies, creating hyperinflation. Economic Times published an article estimated 2019's hyperinflation rate in Venezuela stating that "Venezuela's inflation rate will reach 10 million percent next year"¹ As predictions state that the situation will worsen, Venezuela must make radical reforms in order to improve the country. This research report will show the primary causes of the crisis, political situation and economy of Venezuela, government corruption, and possible solutions for this crisis.

Definition of Key Terms

Hyperinflation

Hyperinflation² is a very rapid inflation, which is the increase of prices of goods. This creates the value of currency to drop and price of good to rise. Due to this rapid change, citizens typically lose confidence in the local currency and switch to a strong and more dependable external currency. In the case of Venezuela citizens began using the US Dollar. During a hyperinflation basic goods become scarce and as an effect very expensive to buy.

Recession

A recession is an economic decline were trade and industry are reduced shown through a fall of the GDP of a country. Therefore there is less money in the country limiting the spending capabilities producing harming effects for the working class and increasing unemployment.

Constituent Assembly

A constituent assembly is also known as a constitutional assembly, which is a body elected by public vote and is in charge of forming a states constitution.

Coup d'état

A Coup d'etat is an uprising similar to a revolution, however is by taking control of a state through control over the military and police.³

Resource-based economy

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https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/66139421.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

² <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hyperinflation.asp>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/coup-detat>

A resource-based economy, or in the specific case of Venezuela, a sole resource-based economy, is a country that is only dependent on one resource for the majority of its income. Typically cities are places that depend solely upon one resource, but in this case a whole countries. The effects that this type of economy can have on a country is good, especially if the resource is oil, but other times it is disastrous due to alterations of demand, producing drops in the price, directly affecting the country's income as a whole.

Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV)

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela is a political party founded in 2007 by Hugo Chavez. It was essentially a party founded on the principles of socialism, Marxism, Bolivarianism, patriotism and participatory democracy, formed by 11 other Venezuelan parties. Hugo Chavez was voted president in 2008 and fought against communism. Following Chavez's presidency, was Nicolas Maduro, voted as president in 2014 and continues to hold this position in the party as of February 2019.

Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD)

The Democratic Unity Roundtable is a Venezuelan coalition against the Chavez and Maduro administrations. It was formed in 2008 in order to, as the name states, unify the opposition against the president. In 2015, supporters of the MUD had a supermajority in the National Assembly.

Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)

PDVSA is Venezuelan state owned oil company and the largest in the country, therefore, allowing the government complete control over the economy of oil in the country. This company was created in 1976 when it was nationalized by the Venezuelan government. The nationalization of oil has boosted the economy and country. Presidents like Chavez and Maduro have used the profits on social projects like the Bolivarian Missions. All of the oil of Venezuela and its profits are directly linked to the government, which has created heavy amounts of corruption.

Background Information

20th Century

Shortly after the First World War oil was discovered in Venezuela which would influence and boost the economy of Venezuela for the following century. Venezuela has

some of the largest oil reserves in the world, allowing the country to thrive on crude oil exports. The country became the richest South American country in the 1970s after oil prices rose.

1992 Venezuelan coup d'état attempts

In 1992 there was an attempt to make a coup d'état in Venezuela. The coup was led by politician Hugo Chávez head of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 founded in 1982. The first coup attempt was on the 4th of February, however Chavez was imprisoned. Another coup attempt was made by a group of people loyal to Chavez's cause. The 70s were very good years for Venezuela, however, in the 80s as competitors emerged in the Middle East and oil prices lowered. Due to Venezuela dependency on oil, as the prices drop the country has less income on exports, meaning that overspending cannot be supplied, lowering the incomes of workers and unemployment. The government could no longer sustain the same ways with low oil prices, therefore there was inflation, worsening the economy. Government corruption was also high, giving rise to the Chavez's revolutionary movement. Due to large debts, Venezuela had to depend on the International Monetary Fund, however must change their social program spending.

Politics

Hugo Chavez's presidency

Hugo Chávez won the election of 1998 by striving to appeal to the people of Venezuela, through strategic propaganda guided towards the people, he was a populist politician. His presidency came to a good start as oil prices increase in the 2000s allowing the government to increase social spending again, which gave Chavez popularity from the people. His social programs were established in the Bolivarian Missions. These programs consisted of around 30 programs focusing on improving health, education, travel, food, housing and others. These measures resulted in overspending for Venezuela and Chavez had to find a solution to the economic crisis. The government's overspending was unsustainable and exposed to an economic crisis due to its sole resource-based economy on oil. In 2013 oil accounted for 95% of exports and a 25% of Venezuela's GDP⁴. Chavez nationalized

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<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2017-02-13/how-to-solve-the-riddle-of-venezuela-s-economy>

hundreds of companies during his presidency including oil companies. In March of 2013 Hugo Chavez died of a heart attack, leaving behind a dysfunctional economy.

His regime was part of what today is considered as XXI century socialism; with the purposes of equality among all citizens in all aspects (economic, wellbeing, healthcare, etc). Chavez wanted to completely change the society, particularly to eliminate completely corruption inside Venezuela. In view to that, he created a program which would eliminate from their position all those workers who were supposed to be corrupted, in order to root out the problem. Chavez was part of the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario, or MBR - 200, which was prepared for armed conflict.

Hugo Chavez's government

Hugo Chavez's government can be considered as a totalitarian one because of many factors⁵. One of the most prominent in his presidency is the persecution of the opposition. By limiting the human rights inside Venezuela, the



government was given the ability to punish and persecute the opponents to Chavez's ideals and way of governing. These punishments could go from mere intimidation from the government to the incarceration. Chavez condemned every person he thought posed a threat to his presidency, or in any way was expressing its thoughts against it.

This was all possible due to the fact that Chavez once he became president of Venezuela, started to control Venezuela's Supreme Court of Justice, as well as the Electoral Court. Chavez also changed Venezuela's Constitution to his wishes, therefore the complete and total authority him and his supporters had in the country. The Supreme Court of Justice started to become integrated by supporters of his regime. The media was also clearly controlled, not only because reporters were afraid of the consequences of writing an article which could be taken against the democracy, but also because the government started to take measures in order to handle all sorts of communication.

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/05/venezuela-chavez-authoritarian-legacy>

Nicolás Maduro presidency

Chavez had taken Nicolas Maduro under his wing in order to win the presidency and continue his legacy in Venezuela. Maduro won by a close margin of votes. He remained in Chavez's path by maintaining his goals to help the people and continued high government



spending. However, as Maduro entered office, shortly after the country's economy started to suffer and the situation to worsen. This was due to how the government dealt with the drop of the oil prices in 2014. In 2016 a poll⁶ was conducted showing that only 20% of Venezuelans favored Maduro. However, as the people wanted him out because of the worsening economy, Maduro consolidated his power which seemed to be an authoritarian action. He accomplished this by two ways: taking control of the national assembly, and the supreme court.

Supreme Court

Nicolás Maduro quickly took control over the Supreme Court by forcing out other justices not loyal to him. The BBC wrote an article about a Supreme Court Justice, Christian Zepa, who fled to the United States in order to protest against Maduro. "Mr Zepa called the Supreme Court 'an appendage of the executive branch', saying the president would tell justices how to rule on certain cases." (BBC, 2019). In 2016, Maduro pushed the Supreme Court to strip away the powers of the National Assembly, the de jure legislation of Venezuela, which had a body consisting of a majority of MUD supporters and anti-Maduro. This was later reversed as protestors took to the streets in support of the National Assembly.

National Constituent assembly

Venezuela's constituent Assembly was created in 2017, and elections were held the 30th July in order to choose the representatives that would be in such assembly.

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics/venezuelan-president-approval-slips-to-minimum-under-20-percent-poll-idUSKBN13D02N>

Despite apparently having been chosen by Venezuelan citizens, there have been claims stating that those elections were fraudulent. The Constituent Assembly essentially replaces the National Assembly of its powers, and is comprised of Maduro supporters, enabling president Nicolas Maduro to change the constitution through his Assembly. Maduro is viewed as an authoritarian ruler because he has taken control over the three sectors of government, executive branch, legislative and judicial. The United States under the Trump administration imposed sanction on Maduro because of the fraudulent poll for the Constituent Assembly.

National Assembly

The National Assembly is an entity whose integrants are partly chosen by voting and partly by proportional party representation. When the Constituent Assembly was elected in 2017, this assembly became the prime opposition to Maduro's re-election, up to the point that according to the National Assembly the re-election was invalid and declared its President, Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's President in 2019.



2019: leader of opposition Juan Guaidó

Juan Guaidó was appointed president of Venezuela's National Assembly the 5th of January 2019, and later on, the 23rd of that month, he made a speech in which he

assumed the role of interim president. Guaidó recalls articles 333, 350 and 233 to back up to illegitimacy of Maduro's presidency and to reach fair elections in Venezuela⁷. Guaidó does not have the support of the Venezuelan military. President Trump of United States of America stated⁸: "Today, I am officially recognizing the President of the Venezuelan National

⁷ http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/_juan-guaido-me-apego-a-los-articulos-333-350-y-233

⁸ <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/merve-sebnem-oruc/2019/02/01/who-is-juan-guaido-the-self-proclaimed-interim-president-of-venezuela>

Assembly, Juan Guaido, as the interim president of Venezuela. In its role as the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people, the National Assembly invoked the country's constitution to declare Nicolas Maduro illegitimate, and the office of the presidency therefore vacant." The United States have not been the only Member State to support Guaido, seeing as EU Member States and other states such as the UK, Canada, Brazil and Argentina.

Venezuela's economy

Venezuela's economy was doing very well in the early decade of the 21st Century, however the mismanagement of funds and large corruption in the country has led to the current economic crisis. Factors that impacted were the drop of oil prices, which deeply affected the nation since it is solely dependent on this resource for income. Oil prices fell over the course of two years, from US\$ 111 a barrel in 2014 to US\$ 27 in 2016, a significant amount, under Maduro's administration. In 2016 Venezuela's economy took a turning point as the GDP dropped 10-15% and inflation rose to 800%. Furthermore, in 2017 Venezuela had entered in a debt of around US\$ 150 billion and did not have enough GDP to pay it off. The effects of this grandiose economic downfall meant that the governments overspending on Chavez's social spending plans, the Bolivarian Missions.

In addition, as Venezuela did not receive enough money off exports, that meant imports were limited, leading to shortages on foreign products. This also elevated the price of basic goods in the country due to the scarce amount of them. The harming effects was a rapid hyperinflation. Venezuela's economy is currently doing very poorly and has compared to be worse than the Great Depression and the fall of the Soviet Union, meaning it will take a long time to improve national conditions until the oil prices increase again.

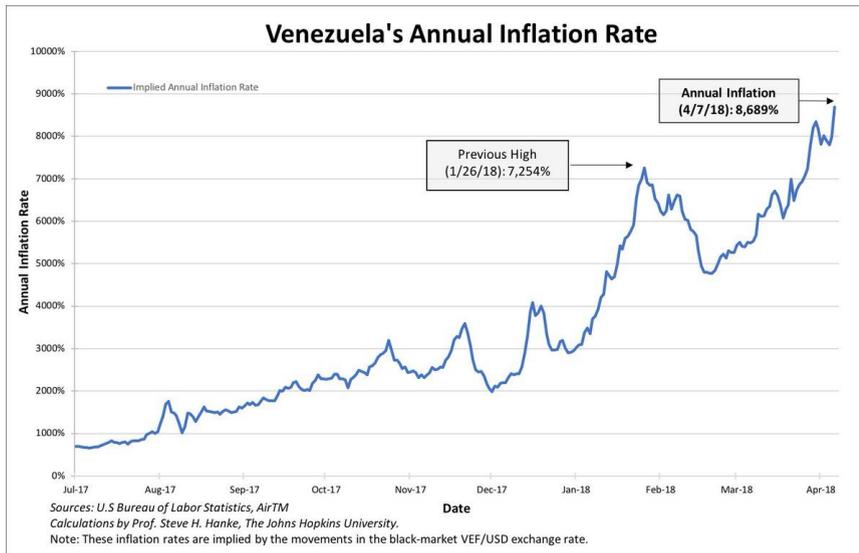


Chart of the inflation in Venezuela

Corruption

A large factor involved in the overall economic crisis of Venezuela is the corruption of high government officials and high ranking workers of Venezuela privatized companies. Corruption has always been an issue in Venezuela, especially due to the possibilities of wealth through oil. Hugo Chávez promoted fighting against corruption, however he maintained a status of a corrupt president, from creating a new constituent assembly to write a new constitution, to filling the Supreme Court with people loyal to him and tried to make a constitutional reform to secure his reelection.

Other instances of corruption such as a scandal with Argentina concerning a suitcase with \$800,000 dollars meant for Argentine president Cristina Kirchner as a contribution for her campaign. The effect of corruption in Venezuela has shown that large sums of public funds have exited the country. Cato Institute showed that, “more than \$22,500,000,000 in dollar transfers have been made to foreign accounts, maintains the Venezuelan Central Bank, and at least half of that money remains unaccounted for.”⁹

Chavez’s death in 2013 did not bring an end to corruption as Maduro’s administration was similar to Hugo Chavez’s. President Maduro has been known to deal with terrorist, as reported by the American Express Institute written by, Roger F. Noriega states: “Sources and documents substantiate Nassereddine’s role as Hezbollah’s principal representative to the Venezuelan regime and a close collaborator of

⁹ <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/corruption-democracy-venezuela>

President Nicolás Maduro.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Maduro has been reported to assist in illicit drug trafficking, as he has depended on two of his nephews, who were later arrested by the Drugs Enforcement Agency for possessing drugs¹¹, fund for campaigning in 2013.¹²

Venezuela’s government has many corrupt high ranking officials. An article published on the 26th of June 2016 stated that “388 people have been convicted for being involved in acts of corruption.”¹³ The effect of corruption in a country is not only monetary, however also increases human right violations. An article by Transparency International states that “Corruption not only obstructs the protection of human rights in Venezuela, it also causes many human rights violations. Venezuela is acquiring one of Latin America’s worst records of human rights violations, as corruption worsens.”¹⁴

Unemployment

The effects on the people from Venezuela’s low income off of exports, means that unemployment rises. According to the International Monetary Fund¹⁵ the current rate of unemployment in Venezuela in 2018 is 38%. This is one of the factors that has produced a large migration of Venezuelanos out of the country and to Europe, North-America, Colombia and other parts of Latin America. Emigration from Venezuela is harmful since hundreds of thousands of professionals have left the country in search of a better income, living conditions and opportunities.

Business and Industry

Most of the industries in Venezuela are related to petroleum, as this is the primary source of income from exports. In addition, other industries in the country are iron, steel, aluminum, agriculture, and fishing.

Currency

¹⁰ <http://www.aei.org/publication/hezbollah-in-the-streets-of-caracas/>

¹¹ https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-casa-militar-maduro-custodio-traslado-droga-sobrinos-201511190248_noticia.html

¹² https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-casa-militar-maduro-custodio-traslado-droga-sobrinos-201511190248_noticia.html

¹³ <https://www.aporrea.org/contraloria/n292935.html>

¹⁴ https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_human_rights_violations_in_venezuela

¹⁵ <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/LUR@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>

Venezuela has two currencies. One of them is the Venezuelan Bolivar, which is worth near to nothing compared to the US dollar (\$1 USD is equal to \$248521 VEF)¹⁶. However, Maduro has created a new currency which is called the Bolivar soberano which essentially cut took off 5 digits from the end of the Venezuelan Bolivar. However, this currency did not prevent inflation. Furthermore, Maduro has created a cryptocurrency for Venezuela called Petro, which was released in 2018. The cryptocurrency is backed by oil and minerals. This currency would allow the country to pass through US sanctions as cryptocurrencies are online and they cannot be traced. The Venezuelan soberano will eventually have a fixed price of 3600 Bolívares soberanos to 1 Petro. The creation of a new currency has created a black market in Venezuela where the price of the bolivar soberano is cheaper than in the market.

Protests against the government

During the Maduro presidency there have been many protests against Maduro. The largest protests occurred on three occasions: 2014, 2017 and 2019.

In 2014, mass protests were carried out in opposition to the economic crisis which was causing violence and inflation, which was 53% in 2013. The protests began in February after the attempted rape of a student. Crowds protested against the government's economic policies and food shortages. The protests led to the deaths of 43 civilians and thousands of arrests. As the protests continued until May, Maduro's government responded by accusing the opposition of staging a coup d'état with support of the United States.

The 2017 Venezuelan protests started again in January due to the arrest of leaders of the MUD. Furthermore, protests began again in March as Maduro used the Supreme Court to dissolve the National Assembly. Further protests were conducted as Maduro's new legislative assembly, the Constituent Assembly had a controversial voting procedure, where Maduro was able to fill the assembly with people loyal to him. The protests lasted till August, and counted a number of 163 deaths around the whole country.

A third protest is taking place, as of February, 2019. The protests began on the 10th of January, 2019 of a mass of people in support of the new interim president Juan Guaido.

Health

¹⁶ <https://transferwise.com/gb/currency-converter/usd-to-vef-rate>

As a consequence of Venezuela's economic problems, the health care has been seriously affected. People are now dying from what used to be common diseases, such as the flu, because of the lack of proper treatments in Venezuela. The Venezuelan government has not paid enough attention to health and to hospitals, and that is the reason why new epidemics which in the past had been regarded eradicated are coming up.

Medicine

Venezuelans do not have enough money to buy the medicine they would need for the treatment of any disease they might have. Even sometimes if they have the money they are not able to because of the lack of medicine and resources inside the country. This situation has worsened up to the point that people bring spare medicine to Venezuela, knowing of the current situation.

Diseases

This does not only mean that anyone who catches common diseases might be seriously affected, because of the lack of medical treatments, but it also threatens the health of borderline countries such as Colombia and Brazil. The latter has been affected by a measles epidemic that occurred due to the lack of vaccinations a proper treatment to the disease.

People from neighbor countries with no health care are prone to catching these 'eradicated' diseases, and later on to the rest of the population, therefore causing an epidemic. This problem is only worsened by the emigrants, which may as well be carrying diseases with them, and spreading them to different countries. One such example would be the measles, or malaria. These diseases have now become a problem to Latin American Member States, which are at risk of the upsurge of an epidemic.



Hospitals

The worst part of the health system are hospitals.¹⁷ The facilities are run-down, and there is no medical personal in some occasions, and precautions are not taken in order to preserve safety. There are much more patients than the capacity of hospitals, and they are in terrible conditions, not enabling full recuperation from patients.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Colombia

Colombia plays a big role in this crisis due to the fact that it is the country that has received the most Venezuelan migrants and has brought aid to them. There have been some borderline problems between Venezuela and Colombia, such as the closure of the border in 2015.

Ecuador

As well as Colombia, Ecuador is taking in a large amount of migrants. However, Ecuador has started to impose more controls to migrants in order to cut down the amount of them.

Brazil

Brazil as well as allowing Venezuelan immigrants inside the country they have been getting epidemic of several diseases such as measles and others.

Perú

Like other countries close to Venezuela, Peru has as well received lot of Venezuelan immigrants. Nevertheless, Peru is starting to stop offering job to those migrants that cross the border every day, due to the large amount of them and the fact that they would be taking away jobs for peruvian citizens.

United States

United States is completely and totally against Maduro's dictatorship and to the way that Venezuela is being governed. United States-Venezuela's diplomatic relationships are completely strained up to the point in which ex-president Barack Obama called the situation

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/10/31/feature/as-venezuelas-health-system-collapse-disease-spreads-beyond-its-borders/?utm_term=.050a999ea6f4

in Venezuela a “threat to its national security”. In 2017, Donald Trump set up sanctions against Venezuela due to Maduro’s fraudulent poll on the Constituent Assembly.¹⁸ On the 23rd of January, 2019, the Trump administration¹⁹ recognized Juan Guaido as the new president of Venezuela instead of Nicolas Maduro, who is still in power as of February 11th. Furthermore, the US has imposed sanctions on the PDVSA in order to harm Venezuela’s weak economy and force Maduro to step down from power in order for Guaido to take power.

Lima Group

The Lima Group is a multilateral group of countries that work together towards ending Venezuela’s crisis as soon as possible and at the same time, in a peaceful manner which benefits Venezuelan citizens.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1973	The prices of oil increase significantly.
1983	Decrease of oil prices.
1992	Chavez attempted a failed coup d’etat, then incarcerated for 2 years.
1998	Election of Hugo Chavez
2007	First time Chavez was defeated in the elections.
2013	Chavez’s death and election of Nicolas Maduro
2014	Venezuelan protests against economic crisis
2015	Colombian-Venezuelan crisis. Border Closure.
2017	Venezuelan protests against the dissolution of National Assembly US imposes sanctions on Maduro
2018	Election of a ‘new president’ by the National Assembly Venezuelan protests
2019	US and other countries recognize Juan Guaido as president of Venezuela US imposes sanctions on Venezuela PDVSA oil company.

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40784516>

¹⁹

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-recognizing-venezuelan-national-assembly-president-juan-guaido-interim-president-venezuela/>

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

(Could not find UN resolutions or treaties)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been some attempts to solve this issue by the government and this measures included; the introduction of a new currency which is called 'Sovereign Bolivar' as well as the raise of both the VAT which was raised to 16% as well as the increment of the minimum wage which increased 34 times to what it was in September 1st.

Possible Solutions

In order to completely solve this issue, both the political and economic side of it should be solved, due to the fact that they are strictly related. Therefore, solving only one of both problems is not the ideal solution, because it is impossible to dissociate them. Member States which do not agree with Venezuela's political situation would not monetarily aid the country, leaving the country to fend for itself. This is one of the main problems of the issue, the lack of possible help from Member States such as the United States of America if the dictatorship in Venezuela continues.

There can be different approaches and views on how to terminate Maduro's dictatorship. The best and less violent of them all would be that Member States continue aiding monetarily with Venezuelan people that wish to leave the country, so as to make sure that everyone would at least have a chance of a better life in another country. This could be done by creating websites in which people and organizations could donate to the cause, as well as creating more programs to integrate those people into the society correctly.

Economic sanctions could also be helpful in order to finish this problem as soon as possible. By getting Member States to stop buying Venezuelan Oil and goods, then maybe the current political situation might be reversed. If this measure does not work effectively, then maybe stricter economic sanctions might be imposed such as barriers, embargos, tariffs, etc.

All sorts of aid for Venezuela should also be welcome inside the country so the

Another salient possible solution would be that to encourage investment on companies inside Venezuela that produce diverse items needed for survival, in order to stop making Venezuela's economy so dependant on oil, and also by creating newer businesses.

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