

to the present system of party slates and proportional representation), and the inadequacy of government services including education and health.

Finally it should be noted that the Venezuela has one of the oldest and most stable democracies in Latin America, dating from the overthrow of the last military dictatorship in 1958. This stability has in part been ensured by a dominant political party system that has been firmly entrenched but is increasing subject to criticism as no longer democratically representing the people's interests, and is sometimes described pejoratively as a "partidocracy".

3. Foreign Policy

The chief aims of Venezuela's foreign policy are the promotion and defence of democracy, particularly in the hemisphere, and the advancement of economic integration and political harmony, again primarily with her neighbours. Under CAP, foreign policy has been activist and personal, with the president on close terms and in regular contact with most leaders of the hemisphere and a number of Europeans.

The United States is by far the country's most important economic partner, with half of both its imports and its exports (including two thirds of its oil exports) as well as half the foreign direct investment in the country. Venezuela's steadiness as a supplier of oil, even increasing production during the Gulf crisis, as well as CAP's outward-looking economic policies and passionate promotion of democracy make him a popular figure in the U.S.

Among Latin American countries, Venezuela is a leader in developing various arrangements for political cooperation and economic integration: with Mexico and Columbia - "the Group of Three", with Columbia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador - the Andean Pact within which has been established a free trade area and a customs union (although Peru has dropped out), as well as bilateral agreements with others, including Brazil and Chile.

Although under CAP relations with Venezuelas neighbours have been excellent there has been some friction with Guyana, over a large section of territory (generally recognized internationally as belonging to Guyana) and with Colombia over