Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicana (PVEM) – a strong Green party, supporting left wing president Obrador

A report to the Global Greens from a visit to PVEM in Monterrey and Mexico City, November 2018

By Per Gahrton, former MP (Green, Sweden) and MEP (Greens), author of *Green Parties, Green Future*, PlutoPress, London 2015)

Introduction

This report is made upon my personal initiative, as a keen Green interested in the international political Green movement, manifested in my book Green parties, Green future, PlutoPress 2015.

Two days with the PVEM in Monterray and Mexico City

During a visit to Mexico together with my wife, Drude Dahlerup, professor of politology and gender studies at Stockholm (Sweden) and Roskilde (Denmark) Universities early November 2018, I spent two full days with representatives of the PVEM in Monterray and Mexico City.

On November 6 I met with the leaders of the PVEM, especially Edgar Salvatierra, "dirigente estadal", in the state of Nueva Leon (4,3 million inhabitants) of which Monterray is the capital (whose Zona Metropolitana has 3,8 milion inhabitants and is the third urban region of Mexico). Edgar, who is originally from Acapulco, has worked for the PVEM since the beginning of the 2000s. He brings me to the PVEM headquarter, where 15 persons (men and women) work and 4 campaign buses are parked outside. Due to some administrative mistakes the election in the city of Monterray was annulled and has to be made anew. PVEM has one seat (out of 42) in the state parliament of Nueva Leon. Edgar is proud of achievements of the PVEM, such as a ban against plastic straws and continued fight for ban against plastic bags; also the ban against animals in circus. I am shown an information video with a very normal Green content, but

with the extra point that it shows PVEM activists practically helping people to organize local life in a more environmentally friendly way, at parks, schools and other public places. Financing of the party comes mainly from the state, some from private contributions. Edgar admits that corruption is a major problem in Mexico; police take a private fee instead of fining people for infractions of traffic regulations.

I ask Edgar about the infamous PVEM position in favor of death penalty (see more below). He explains that the reason behind is the extreme situation in some parts of Mexico with mafia ruled towns, kidnappings and rapes of children. He claims that according to opinion polls 70 % of the Mexicans support some death penalty, but admits that support from other political parties is very rare.

According to Edgar the new president Obrador is a populist, but not like Trump or Bolsonaro; on the contrary Obrador is a left wing populist. This opinion is supported by several newspapers and magazines. El Processo says that Obrador is a “lonely wolf” but not authoritarian. El Financeiro compares him with Chavez. Already about a month before his inauguration he has announced several left wing populist moves, such as limitation of political salaries, stop for state pensions to former presidents, protection against inflation for normal salaries; he has also announced legalization of marijuana. A move that has irritated many is that Obrador and his party MORENA organized a private referendum about the building of a new airport in Mexico City (which is already on its way), which he opposed. He preferred the rebuilding of a military airport, which critics say was motivated only by the fact that the ongoing project was started by his political opponents

On Nov 9 I met in Mexico City with Leonardo Alvarez Romo, former MP, former president of the Federation of Green Parties of America and responsible for foreign relations of the PVEM. He brought me to the headquarters of PVEM, which due to the awkward timing (my fault) at Friday afternoon was rather empty, but usually employs

some 80 people. He admitted that PVEM may not have been started like some European Green parties, by a coalition of alternative and Green grassroot movements, but rather by an ecologically interested rich person, José Gonzales Torres, who, Leonardo emphasized, did not need to earn money by creating a political party, but overall has given much more to the party. When his son, Jorge Emilio Gonzales Martinez, later was elected party leader it was done democratically, with transparence and in the lights of TV cameras. Since 2011 there is a new leadership outside the family. But Leonardo does not hesitate to indicate to me a closed office as the room "of our moral leader". We discuss a lot of other aspects, among other things the very critical overview of the PVEM at the Spanish language Wikipedia (different points will be treated below), to which I get answers at our meeting verbally or later by mail.

PVEM declares support for president Obrador

At the inauguration of the new president of Mexico Dec 1 st 2018 the spokesperson of the PVEM in the Senate, Raúl Bolaños Cacho, announced that the PVEM from now on is supporting the presidency of the left wing Andrés Manuel López Obrador, MORENA, who was elected in July with more than 53 % of the votes. While recognizing important achievements of the outgoing president Enrique Peña Nieto, PRI, which PVEM had been supporting during his reign and whose candidate PVEM supported during the election campaign, the PVEM spokesperson added that now it is time for 120 million Mexicans to turn into a new direction and declared "our respect and recognition of the president Lopéz Obrador". (La Jornada, 2 Jan 2019: Respaldan PT, PES y PVEM a López Obrador/The PT, PES and PVEM support Lopés Obrador).

PVEM and the election of July 1, 2018 – set-back but still strong

The result of the presidential election was: Andres Manuel López Obrador, Morena, 53,19 % (30.113.483 votes); Ricardo Anaya, PAN,

22, 28%; Jose Antonia Meade, PRI, 16,41%, Jaime Ridriguez Calderon 5,23%. PVEM supported Meade, PRI.

In the election to the Senate PVEM received 4,46% of the votes, which gave the party 6 Senators (out of 128). In the election to the Chamber of Deputies PVEM received 4,8% of the votes, which gave the party 16 seats (out of 500). /Wikipedia in Spanish: Elecciones federales de México de 2018/.
Leonardo Alvarez, Foreign Secretary of the PVEM, comments: "There were almost 2.5 million Mexicans that voted for us, giving us: 16 Federal Deputies (5 of them went to the Morena wing in order to give AMLO the majority in the low chamber), 6 Senators, the government in dozens of cities in Mexico, and hundreds of city councilors and dozens of local congressmen throughout the country."
Considering the number of votes PVEM is the fifth strongest party (out of eight) in the Senate and the fourth strongest (out of nine) in the Chamber of Deputies. However the Mexican election system is a complicated mixture of majoritarian, individual and proportional methods, which gave the result that PVEM based on the number of MP:s appear to be smaller than based upon votes, nr 6 in the Senate and nr 8 in the Chamber of Deputies. Anyhow the result of the election 2018 was a set-back compared with the election of 2015 when PVEM received about 7,5 % of the votes and almost 50 MP:s in the two chambers. Still PVEM remains one of the strongest parliamentary Green Parties in the world.

Gender balance and feminism

The election of 2018 has made Mexico into a country with one of the best political gender balances in the world. 49 % of the Deputies and 51% of the Senators are women, the government has gender balance. The new mayor of Mexico City is a woman, supported by a city assembly with 50/50 gender balance. So, what about PVEM? The six seats in the Senate are evenly divided between 3 men and 3 women, while the remaining group of 11 deputies (since five left for Morena)

is uneven: 8 men and 3 women. A clear majority of party leaders at the state level are male. However, politically it is clear that PVEM is pursuing female issues just as any Green party. One example is a proposal in the Senate by PVEM Senator Gabriela Benavides Cobos about gender balance and political violence, presented in September 2018 (The home page of PVEM: INTERVENCIÓN DE LA SENADORA GABRIELA BENAVIDES COBOS, AL PRESENTAR UNA INICIATIVA DE REFORMAS EN MATERIA DE PARIDAD DE GÉNERO Y VIOLENCIA POLÍTICA, Publicado el: 13 Septiembre 2018).

The history of the PVEM is more male dominated than the history of several European Green parties, but not unlike what could be found among some Green parties in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Ideologically PVEM is undoubtedly on the track of gender balance, women's rights etc, but organizationally it is lagging behind somewhat.

Demand for death penalty – finally cancelled

Capital punishment in Mexico was officially abolished on 15 March 2005, having not been used in civil cases since 1937, and in military cases since 1961. Mexico is the world's most populous country to have completely abolished the death penalty. PVEM has stirred many critical reactions both in Mexico and abroad, especially among Green parties, by its position in 2008 in favor of reintroduction of the death penalty. In a parliamentary debate PVEM-MP Veronica Velasco argued that "the population demands since some time firm and decisive actions to confront the violence and we cannot ignore that a large sector has expressed a wish to reintroduce death penalty in the country". However the support from other parties was very small; even the then partner PRI refused to accept the proposal. (La Jornada, 10 diciembre 2008: Rechazan en San Lázaro la propuesta del Verde de debatir sobre la pena de muerte). In 2015 it was announced that the PVEM had abolished the proposal for death penalty, but some weeks before to elections of 2018 it was relaunched. The

national leader of the Greens, MP Carlos Puente, declared that many men and women were asking PVEM to relaunch its former demand for introduction of death penalty for drug crimes, rape and kidnapping, even if under very restricted conditions. “We are not aiming at killing anybody, only to make examples”. (La Jornada May 17, 2018: Retomará PVEM en Congreso iniciativa de pena de muerte).

In a mail to me Leonardo Alvarez now declares that the proposal to reintroduce death penalty has been completely abolished by the PVEM:

“The exact status today is cancelled, yes, because of international Human Rights principles, because the Chart of the Earth, and because of our allies, MORENA, that are not in favor, and as a matter of fact in the talks to make this new alliance we agree with them not to propose the death penalty in the sense that we did cancel it officially in 2015. What happened is that one of our congressmen without asking or consulting the Party, this year proposed to relaunch that issue, but it didn’t had eco and we manage to silence his intentions, it wasn’t a policy supported by all Mexican Greens nor the Party. Anyway - TODAY that issue is cancelled definitely.”

Administrative problems/corruption

According to some critical sources, including Spanish Wikipedia, the PVEM on a number of occasions has failed to fulfil all formal conditions for party activities, for which it has been fined several times. Some personal relations with some TV-stations, such as TV Azteka, have been mentioned by critics as proof of lack of independence of the PVEM. However, as concluded in one critical analysis, the PVEM has not been guilty of infractions to the extent that it has lost its registration as political party. (2018-01-31; http://www.nacion321.com/partidos/en-serio-para-que-sirve-y-a-quien-el-partido-verde-ecologista-de-mexico). According to this report the relevant authorities, when asked by critics to revoke the registration

of PVEM, have replied that such a move in a democracy can only be made by the voters. PVEM has since many years received enough votes at elections to be able to continue as a legal party.
The comment by Leonardo Alvarez is that PVEM has been persecuted by enemies and sometimes fined for minor “ridiculous” infractions.

Relations to environmental movements

According to critical voices the PVEM has no or bad relations to the environmental movements of Mexico. One example was when some environmentalists protested in 2013 against the appointment by the PRI government of a PVEM-representative, Juan José Guerra Abud, as minister of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) (La Jornanda: Censuran ambientalistas la entrega de la Semarnat al Partido Verde, Miércoles 2 de enero de 2013). The newspaper La Jornada refers to a report on the PVEM (La ética ambiental: estudio del caso Partido Verde Ecologista de México, de Miguel Alvarado Cardona y Rolando Reynoso Pérez, del Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones y Estudios sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo del Instituto Politécnico Nacional, IPN), which claims that PVEM “was not the result of a struggle by political activists or a split-off from a left wing party but has its origin in the ideas of a businessman to create a new party with modern and nice values which are shared by many Mexicans, naming itself ‘Green’ in order to cover a market niche that might be very profitable”. At the same time this report is admitting that PVEM on its home page is presenting itself as an organisation of ecologists, committed to the respect for all forms of life, environmental protection and stop for the ecological deterioration, with an ambition to support sustainable development which permits human beings to live in a just and free society, in harmony with nature.

A similar scenario was repeated in September 2018 when some ecologists protested against the election of a PVEM representative as chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Environment (La Jornada,

Jueves 27 de septiembre de 2018: Activistas no quieren al Partido Verde en comisión ambiental). As arguments were given alleged anti-ecological legislation about forestry and biodiversity which PVEM had supported together with its ruling partner, PRI.

Leonardo Alvarez in a mail to me gives quite another picture of the environmental record of the PVEM: “The truth is that there are SOME movements well identified that periodically criticized us, and are always the same people, and they are not ‘the’ intellectuals of Mexico, they are not the most of them. ..They are not the sages of the country or the environmentalist ideologues of the nation, nor those who hold Mexico’s sustainable voice, nor most environmentalists.”

According to Leonardo many of the harshest critics are old time enemies of the Greens, often leftists. He underlines: “Only 35 alleged civil associations are the ones that we identify as our always time critics; Mexico has officially registered 27 thousand 078 civil associations, this means that 27 thousand 42 civil associations do not have a bad relation with us, the 35 alleged associations are an insignificant figure, so the sayings of these associations lack credibility as representatives of Mexican civil society. On the other hand, 287 academics are the ones that we identify as being always criticizing us, but Mexico has registered 72 thousand 590 university professors, meaning that 72 thousand 303 academics did not have a negative public opinion toward us.”

Leonardo replies that the critics forget basic facts, such as the role played by PVEM in drafting article 4th of the Political Constitution of México: “Everyone has the right to a healthy environment for their development and welfare. The State shall ensure respect for this right. Damage and environmental degradation will generate responsibilities for those who are causing them, in terms of the provisions of the law”.

Other “Green” facts about PVEM that the critics avoid, according to Leonardo: PVEM has been the driving force in all the country for replacing conventional plastic bags for biodegradable ones. In 1999, the Green Party of Mexico presented the first proposal at national and international level for the issuance of a Climate Change Act that served as background for the creation of General Law on Climate Change, issued on June 6, 2012. Now more than 10 states of the Mexican Republic have specific laws on climate change thanks to the PVEM (Baja California, Coahuila, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Mexico State, Puebla, Veracruz, Sinaloa and Mexico City, and more). Mexico has, largely thanks to several PVEM reforms, a General Law on Sustainable Forestry Development since 2003, replacing the previous "Forest Law" and placing the focus on sustainable use of forest resources, raising penalties for illegal loggers. We contributed to create the Specialized Investigation Unit Against Environmental Crimes. It was the Green Party in our National Congress who presented the initiative to protect the mangroves, prohibiting any development where mangrove forests are located, approved in 2007. Through various reforms to the General Law on Wildlife the PVEM achieved partial or complete protection for various emblematic species at risk, including laws protecting marine mammals and primates (2006), turtles (2006), parrots and parakeets (2008). PVEM proposed the "circus without animals" by prohibiting the use of specimens of wildlife in circuses, approved and published on January 9, 2015. 31 of the 32 states of the country have already an Animal Protection Act, largely thanks to the PVEM. PVEM has prompted the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) of the recent past Federal Government to design or improve, along with other federal agencies, public policy instruments on Climate Change. This instrument led to achievements like enrichment or creation of the National Strategy on Climate Change, and the Special Climate Change Program. The PVEM influenced Mexican government to submit 5 Communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the only Latin American country to do so). Mexico was one of the first countries to introduce its Intender

National Determined Contributions (INDC). Mexico promoted concrete actions as contributions to the Green Climate Fund and Global Environment Fund. Those achievements were possible because the presence and influence by PVEM in the SEMARNAT. From SEMARNAT the PVEM urged the transformation of the Metropolitan Environmental Commission in the Valley of Mexico (created in 1996) to create the Environmental Commission of Megalopolis (CAME).

Leonardo also refutes accusations that PVEM supports "the use of highly destructive techniques" and replies: In 2008 the PVEM proposed the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy and the Financing for Energy Transition approved in Congress on November 8, 2008. In 2009 the Green Party proposed reform laws to set a maximum target of 65% share of fossil fuels in power generation by 2024, 60% in 2035, and 50% in 2050, adopted on June 11, 2011. PVEM propelled the Federal Government, through the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) in the past administration, to design or improve, along with other federal agencies, public policy instruments, policies like the National Energy Strategy, the Special Program for the Development of Renewable Energy, and the National Program for sustainable Use of Energy.

More examples of Green actions by PVEM: Deputies and Senators from the PVEM have legislated to give tax relief only to sustainable and environmentally sound projects, and they have expressed their concern about the problem of Canadian mining in Mexico. Just one case will serve to support this. It was a member of the PVEM, the former Green State President and local Green Deputy, Manuel Barrera, who while serving as Secretary of Environment in the Government of the San Luis Potosi State, led a movement of resistance within the government. This action was done to stop the exploitation of Canadian mining in Cerro del Quemado, place of high environmental and cultural value, a sacred site to the Huichol Indigenous people.

Leonardo concludes: All the above shows that the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico is a decisive and powerful force with a proven environmental vocation, full of young people with initiative, with fresh and creative ideas. The PVEM should be the pride of the Green force of the Americas and the world. Instead of "using the green flag" as some say, we honor an "environmental vision" that rejects anything affecting our country that we love and give ourselves. And as we have proven, we reject "ecological damage" (we are the ones who integrated into the national legal system Penalizing Damage and Environmental Deterioration as well as the legal concept of The One Who Pollutes, Pays).

Finally Leonardo calls upon the Green political movement to recognize the PVEM as one of the most important and working green forces in the Global Greens: " We should always remember the reason for our existence as Greens organizations, we exist to strengthen each other in a responsibly way, united in diversity. Mexican Greens, as members of the Federation of Green Parties of the Americans and of the Global Greens, exist to strengthen the Green cause, together with the rest of the Greens."

Conclusions:

There are several points of criticism against the PVEM that has caused somewhat tense relations to some other Greens parties:

1. *The death penalty.* Proposing death penalty is of course not compatible with being a Green party. It is not easy to understand why PVEM now and then has launched and relaunched such an odd proposal, especially in a country like Mexico, which in reality since long has abolished death penalty. The explanation given, that parts of Mexico suffer from very violent mafia structures and that a large part of the population demands the reintroduction of the death penalty, is not satisfactory. There are no scientific facts supporting the efficiency of death penalty to prevent certain crimes. The moral arguments

against are overwhelming and has moved the Council of Europe to ban it among all its members states. Also in large parts of the rest of the world the death penalty is out. 72 % of the UN member states (142) have formally or practically abolished the death penalty, including most of Latin America. Nothing indicates that PVEM has made electoral gains from the proposal (the latest election in July 2018 after a relaunch was a set-back).

Thus, it is very positive to take note of the information that now this awkward incident of Green history is terminated, which facilitates a full and just overall view of the PVEM, which has been blurred by the death penalty proposal.

2. *Family firm or political party*. It has been claimed that the PVEM is a family business firm more than a genuine political party. It is correct and undenied by PVEM that it was started more on personal initiative by an environmentally committed person, than through collective political struggle. However nothing supports the accusation that it originated and has remained a profitable business more than a political party. The mere idea that creating a political party could be a profitable business endeavor seems very odd.

It is not unique that some veterans of Green parties keep a special position in the minds of the Green activists, such as Petra Kelly in Germany, Wangari Maathai in Kenya, Alexander Langer in Italy, Sara Parkin in the UK, Dany Cohn-Bendit in Germany and France, and others. Thus if there is a special reverence among Mexican Greens for the founders of the party, it does not mean that PVEM could be reduced to a “family business”.

Whatever was the origin of the PVEM, today it has all the basic qualities of being a genuine political party, with nation-wide presence, democratic internal structure and an overwhelmingly Green agenda.

3. *Administrative problems/corruption*. It is not possible to make out exactly how and why the PVEM has committed infractions of the electoral system; it is not possible to prove that no individual cases of corruption has occurred.

However, the important fact is that the PVEM is considered a legal and legitimate political party by all relevant authorities and institutions in Mexico and is allowed to participate in elections and even in the government according to legal and democratic rules.

4. *Switch of political alliance*. Some European Greens have reacted against the cooperation of the PVEM with parties of a type that some left minded European Greens would never cooperate with, like PAN of Fox and PRI of Nieto. However also in Europe genuine Greens have been allied in governments with parties more right-wing than leftwing, i e Finland, Czech Republic, Ireland. On local and regional levels such alliances with democratic ring-wing or center parties are pretty common even in countries where the Greens on the national level so far have cooperated only with the Left, for example in Germany and Sweden.

Conditions for legitimacy as a Green party must only take programs, principles and platforms into account, not tactical moves and strategic alliances which always are very linked to special temporary and local conditions. Anyhow, it probably will calm down some international Green apprehension about PVEM that it has now joined forces with the new left wing regime in Mexico – it proves at least that PVEM ideologically is not rightwing, but rather Green, just as, to my mind, all Green parties should be: neither Right, nor Left, nor Center, which are concepts according to an outdated scale Greens were formed to overhaul in order to put Quality instead of Quantity at the focus of political activity.

5. *Relation to environmental organisations and Green issues*. I think the reply above by Leonardo Alvarez is satisfactory. The picture he

gives is corroborated by the PVEM home page. It is unconceivable that this Green approach of PVEM, which I also noted during my visit to Mexico, should be only fake news and a bluff to cover up a profit-seeking private business, to which then, if it were true, thousands of PVEM representatives must have been accomplices.

To my mind it is very natural that environmental movements are not satisfied with a Green party's achievements as minor partner in a government. The environmental and alternative NGO:s should act in a non-compromising way, pursuing their demands without tactical considerations. The role of political parties is another one – to achieve as much as possible in a parliamentary democratic system, without the existence of a Green majority among the voters. This makes it necessary for parties to negotiate and make compromises. This happens to all Green parties which get the opportunity to participate in the governance of their country. One example is Sweden 2014-18 when the Swedish Greens has had to accept quite a number of not-very-Green governmental actions, proposed by its "big brother" in government, the Social Democrats, in exchange for several very-Green decisions and regulations. My impression is that PVEM pursues a very active Green agenda and has considerable success, but of course sometimes has to swallow some bitter pills. This doesn't exclude that PVEM itself has taken positions that some other Greens would not have taken. There is not always an obvious Green answer, valid all over the world, to every societal problem, not even to every environmental problem.

<u>Overall evaluation: PVEM is a genuine Green party</u>

Thus, my over-all evaluation is that the PVEM, whatever has happened during its sometimes turbulent history, is a genuine Green political party with a Green political agenda, nation-wide presence in Mexico, a functioning electoral organisation and considerable parliamentary representation on all administrative levels. In addition I support the switch of alliance from PRI to MODENA, which seems to

make Mexico into a rare hopeful example in our time of right-wing populist advances all over the globe.

Lund, Sweden, January 6, 2019
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NB. This report is made upon my own initiative, without any mission from any Green or other organisation.