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## **Gabriel Boric new President of Chile. The country turns over a new leaf, but there's a difficult road ahead. The Church asks to "broaden the avenues of dialogue"**

The two candidates couldn't have been more different, each surrounded by uncertainties, including serious ones. In yesterday's presidential runoff election Chilean citizens had to choose between continuing along the path they had embarked on two years ago with social protests that questioned - even violently - the inequalities caused by a liberalist economic model dating back to the time of Augusto Pinochet, and never fully revised - thus continuing with the Constituent process -, or turning back the clock two years, at least. *Chilean voters clearly chose the former, which all considered is the most logical and coherent path, although, as mentioned, it is not without risks. Gabriel Boric was thus elected President with 55.87% of the vote.* During this past month, the 35-year-old former student leader tried hard to project a reassuring and moderate image of himself, despite the support of the Communist Party, among others. However, the alternative option was an even more "extremist" choice. In fact, José Antonio Kast is a far right leader who opposes the Constituent Assembly and who supported Pinochet in his youth. That dark past surrounded his entire election campaign, especially after his unexpected victory in the first round, and it grew darker in the run-up to the election, after the death of the dictator's wife last Thursday. Lucía Hiriart Rodríguez was 99 years old and was considered the 'iron lady' who played a key role in shaping the profile of the ruthless dictator.

**The spectre of Pinochet.** "In my opinion, the death of Pinochet's widow did not bring votes to the right. In fact the opposite could be true, although mine is just speculation", said **Luis Horacio Franco Gaviria**, Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Chile, presently researcher for the Phylouris group at the Free University of Colombia - Cali, coordinator of international cooperation projects and researcher for the NGO Aculco in Madrid, where he currently lives. According to the professor, "what has happened rekindled memories of that period, with its legacy of mourning for the country. *No one wants to relive those years. On the whole, today's voters tend to have a poor memory. However, before an event like the death of Mrs. Pinochet, those memories come rushing back.* It is widely known that Kast once expressed support for Pinochet, for the "Thatcher" model, and more recently for Bolsonaro." *Young people's vote proved decisive. But that was not the main reason for Boric's victory.* According to Franco Gaviria, "the left-wing candidate adopted a clear strategy over the last few weeks to regain a lead over Kast, focusing on young people - many of whom had deserted the polls in the first round - and on ordinary people. In contrast, Kast tried to forge alliances with the defeated candidates, notably economist Franco Parisi, who came third. Boric's choice was consistent with his profile, namely that of a candidate who voiced the protests of the last two years. The people are now asking him not to suspend the Constituent Assembly process, and to guarantee increased public services and quality education. In short, the Chilean electorate opted - albeit by a slim margin - to follow the same path taken in the vote on the Constituent Assembly a few months ago. The newly elected president - promptly congratulated by his opponent and outgoing president Sebastián Piñera - reiterated this stance in his first remarks : "My daily commitment is to protect democracy in neighbourhoods, keeping a foot in the streets, because La Moneda palace belongs to the people, and social organisations must play a leading role." *However, this is no guarantee that the new president's road ahead will be smooth. First of all, he will have to dispel doubts about his reformist outlook.* "Boric has previously voiced support for Maduro's Venezuelan government," recalls Franco Gaviria. Moreover, "the political, social and economic situation is extremely complex, not least because of the pandemic. In any case, Boric will have to scale down his proposal and negotiate with a parliament where he has no definite majority." *The underlying situation is one of extreme polarisation, confirmed in the runoff, with Kast winning in many suburban areas of the country.* This trend is common throughout the continent: "It's the result of political discredit in Latin America and elsewhere. People are not voting *for*, but *against* the

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candidate they don't want." **The Church asks for broad "avenues of dialogue."** At any rate, Chile is turning over a new leaf, and the fact that voter turnout was higher than a month ago is a positive sign. In the run-up to the elections, the Church had urged people to cast their vote. It was the invitation of the Bishops' Conference, reiterated emphatically by some bishops, such as Msgr. **Fernando Chomali**, archbishop of Concepción, saying it was a "delicate yet interesting moment", and Msgr. **Luis Infanti della Mora**, bishop of the apostolic vicariate of Aysén, who pointed out: "Power is not only about the economic dimension." *He thus highlighted the need to listen to the voice of civil society, which is calling for social policies tailored to the needs of the weakest.* "It's the failure of the Chicago boys' free-market paradigm", remarked human rights expert **Cristiano Morsolin**, according to whom, *"as Msgr. Infanti says, a new challenge lies ahead, with Pope Francis' 'three T's' - Tierra, Techo e Trabajo (land, home and work) - and the fight against poverty as its underlying theme."* The requests made by the Bishops' Conference to the new president on the eve of the elections remain valid:

**"We ask him to govern for all Chileans, seeking avenues of dialogue, understanding, justice and fraternity."**

These words were reiterated in the message sent to the new President by the Bishops' Conference immediately in the early evening: "The country has cast a vote of confidence in you and entrusts you with a great mission, bound to guide the destiny of our country as its leading authority and first servant". For its part, "the Chilean Church will continue to offer her contribution, through her particular mission, towards the development of a more just and fraternal humanity, where especially the poor and those suffering are respected in their dignity. You can rely on our support and our prayers, and on the contribution of our pastoral ministry, which we will always carry out with due respect for the democratic order of our country and its legitimately elected dignitaries." \*journalist, "La vita del popolo"

Bruno Desidera\*