

7. The situation of Amazônia Legal during the Bolsonaro Government and possible future perspectives

In Amazonia, there was a climate of violence and a weakening or absence of judiciary power. Ethical principles and environmental justice were ignored by the Bolsonaro government. There was no liability to protect this region and its Indigenous and neo-Brazilian rural populations. His mindless rejection of all major issues of climate change and the importance of tropical rain forests of Amazonia as greenhouse gas storage was not only internationally problematic for Brazil, but also contributed to squandering Brazil's ecological capital. Negative consequences of large-scale deforestation have been denied, important climate data withheld or ridiculed as an invention by misguided scientists who were against national progress. The manner in which Bolsonaro led the government divided the Brazilian society and radicalised supporters who were spurred on in their illegal actions in Amazonia. On social media, his clientele spread the crudest conspiracy theories and fake news.

The Brazilian government remained increasingly isolated internationally. The deliberately unsolved Amazon issue hampered international communication and Brazil's potential in the field of renewable energies and green hydrogen, which could open up close cooperation opportunities with the EU, remained untapped during his term of office. Even political relations with China – after all Brazil's main trading partner – were threatened by the activities of members of the government.

Bolsonaro's four-year term ended with a 60 % increase in Amazonian deforestation rates, the highest in a presidential term since 1988, when measurements by satellite imagery began. Intensification of agricultural and ranching activities in non-forest regions of the country could have prevented destruction of biodiversity in rain forests and the living space of native populations. However, Bolsonaro gave free access to all interested in ranching, crop cultivation, logging, and gold mining in Amazonia.

Amazonia had become a free space for all kinds of economic exploitation. All previous attempts to contribute to sustainable development in Amazonia through specific projects with participation of regional and local groups and communities have been negated and mostly discredited at national level during the Bolsonaro government. Even numerous cabinet reshuffles and significant concessions to the *Centrão*⁴⁶⁷ have not helped Bolsonaro to secure his re-election.

467 In Brazilian politics, the *Centrão* ("big centre") refers to political parties that do not have a consistent ideological orientation and aim at ensuring proximity to the executive in order to guarantee advantages and allow them to distribute privileges through clientelist networks.

The lessons learned of the former rain forest protection programme PPG7 and other projects had not yet reached the responsible politicians of the central government in Brasília or were not used for ideological reasons. However, Brazil will continue to depend on international cooperation in the future and certainly does not want to endanger its image as a global player. The ecosystems of Amazonia, the regional and the global climate in the long term won't forgive a lack of understanding of the ecological and socio-economic necessities, a lack of environmental awareness and misguided action of politicians under the pressure of agribusiness and timber lobbies.