

Costa Rican Congress Abandons Escazu Agreement on Environment



photo by Patrick T. Fallon / Courtesy AFPp

The Costa Rican Congress voted on Wednesday to abandon the Escazu Agreement on the environment, despite the fact that the country was, together with Chile, the promoter of this emblematic Latin American agreement.

The deadline for approving the project ended on February 1, after four years of proceedings without progress, and a proposal to extend the discussion for another four years was rejected. With 41 votes against, 11 in favor and one absence, the Legislative Assembly buried the bill in the archives, which caused dismay among the deputies who wanted Costa Rica to approve the Agreement.

“Thus we went from being a country at the forefront in environmental matters to one that does not even manage to approve an international agreement on minimum rights,” said Congressman Jonathan Acuña, of the leftist Frente Amplio, on social networks. The social Christian congresswoman Melina Ajoy argued her vote against “taking into account the considerations of the productive sector, as well as of several technical organizations, which indicate that the instrument [the Latin American agreement] can be a conditioning factor for development”, she said on Twitter.

It is now up to the Executive to propose it again for legislative debate, although Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves commented as soon as he took office in May 2022 that it is not among his priorities. The agreement, named after the Costa Rican municipality where negotiations were concluded in 2018, guarantees access to information on environmental matters, the right to citizen participation in decisions affecting the environment and protection for nature defenders. It has already been ratified by 14 countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Uruguay.