

CUBA – EUROPE DIALOGUES

No. 3 / 2007

QUARTERLY BULLETIN ON RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBANS AND EUROPEANS

SPECIAL ISSUE:

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CUBAN TRANSITION

The Transitional Menu

FREDO ARÍAS KING

10

Four Lessons from Chile

RODOLFO SEGUEL MOLINA

13

Plan Martí

LUIS ALBERTO LACALLE

15

ICDC's Virtual Embassy

HERNÁN ALBERRO

31

Five Europeans Shaking Castro's Legends

JAN RUML

34

Is Cuba a Right-Wing Topic?

GABRIEL C. SALVIA

EDITORIAL

2

3

An Opportunity for Mexico

MANUEL ESPINO

17

The Next Steps for the Americas

JAIME TROBO

19

The Mexican Debt to Cubans

CRISTIÁN CASTAÑO CONTRERAS

22

Transitional Experience:

An Economic Analysis of

Central European Reforms

LESZEK BALCEROWICZ

37

Cuban-Venezuelan Economic Relations

JULIO BORGES

5

Fidel's Pilgrims

CLAUDIO PAOLILLO

24

The Cuban View

LUCAS GARVE

27

Medical Cooperation

DAVID I. RABINOWITZ

29

Documents:

UNITY FOR FREEDOM

42

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE EU

43

NGO ACTIVITIES

46

ANALYSIS

OPINIONS

EVENTS



Photo by Pvel Hrach

Molecón in Havana

A RIGHT WING TOPIC? ARGENTINA, LATIN AMERICA AND CUBA

Gabriel C. Salvia

It is likely that Argentina is one of those countries whose attitude has been a great disappointment for Cuban democrats. They simply fail to understand why a country which itself had a first-hand experience of a cruel dictatorship shows no solidarity with the island. Notwithstanding the different arguments that try to justify the long-lasting dictatorship of the Castro brothers, especially the American

embargo and the reputed “David and Goliath,” fight, and despite the beliefs that social rights are superior to civil and political liberties, no one who considers himself to be a democrat can regard the Cuban revolution as a defensible phenomenon. Then why is it that so many representatives of Argentinean democracy identify themselves with the Cuban dictatorship or are at least indulgent towards it?

SOMEWHAT OF A RIGHT-WING MATTER

There are many answers to this question, yet the most important thing to be considered now is the idea of collaboration with the critics of Castroism in Argentina.

Obviously, among Argentinean left-wing democrats, only a very few open-



photo by Lobo

Huarano

ly criticize the violation of human rights in Cuba, despite the fact that this issue should actually be in the focus of their attention. Or, to put it differently, who else has the moral authority to condemn the violation of human rights if not those who once suffered in the same way?

And the public opinion in Argentina would really be much different if Castro's dictatorship was openly damned by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo¹, the Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)², progressive and influential journalists or other important figures. The problem is not that the Grandmothers, the CELS or personalities such as the ex-president Raúl Alfonsín would defend the Cuban revolution, but rather that in Argentina, the condemnation of Fidel Castro has become a somewhat right-wing matter.

In general, the criticism of Cuban revolution in Argentina indeed does come from figures or groups who once held an indulgent position towards the last military dictatorship and even collaborated with it. In other Latin American countries, the situation is the same. And if we consider the progressive sectors that somehow yearn for the "ideals of the revolution," the global position on Cuba becomes neutralized.

One may find it hard to believe, but in Argentina, many prefer not to condemn a dictatorship like Castro's simply because its main critics are unrepresentable figures. And precisely because it is the complicity between the regime of Fidel Castro and the supporters of the Argentinean military regime what makes both sides feel uncomfortable, the defenders of human rights should be encouraged to stand up, for we are facing a very important chapter of justice, history and its rectification.

EDITORIAL

If changes occur in Cuba, what can Latin-American countries offer to aid Cuba's transition? What lessons are applicable? What mistakes should be avoided?

People in Need and the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) has been trying to tackle these questions in the past years' debates between European politicians and former dissidents and their counterparts in Americas. Although they come from different backgrounds, their conclusions are surprisingly similar: a transition to democracy needs a great deal of courage by local leaders and generous offer of international support.

Various distinguished authors contributed their opinions to this debate. Gabriel C. Salvia (Argentina), Cristián Castaño Contreras (Mexico) and Claudio Paolillo (Uruguay) explain that the relation between Cuba and the countries of Latin America is always ambiguous. It has become a myth, a taboo, a symbol in partisan debates. Therefore anything "can trigger an overnight change in foreign policy towards Cuba" writes Hernán Alberro (Argentina). Jaime Trobo (Uruguay) describes what steps would facilitate this change.

Rodolfo Seguel (Chile), a union leader who peacefully fought Pinochet and other dictators, describes his visit to the real Cuba and the key lessons from the Chilean experience. Cubans might look more towards Europe and North America for inspiration, writes Lucas Garve (Cuba), as the region has a troubled past. However, there are some exceptions, and Chile is most likely the poster child, sums up Fredo Arias King (Mexico). It is therefore important

that the Interantional Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) continues with its dialogue in the Americas, as described in a first hand account by Jan Ruml (Czech Republic).

Julio Andrés Borges (Venezuela) analyzes today's most pressing issue. He proves in detail how Hugo Chávez is sponsoring the decaying Cuban economy in exchange for thousands of Cuban experts. In another economic paper, Leszek Balcerowicz (Poland) complements Borges' article by calculating the costs of totalitarianism and benefits of transition in Central and Easter Europe.

The ICDC and European NGOs recently put forward many activities. We offer you only a small part of the outcomes, including the policy paper from the April conference in Berlin and an appeal to support the unity of Cuban opposition.

Nikola Hořejš

nikola.horejs@peopleinneed.cz

The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) was founded in September 2003 by Václav Havel and other prominent international statesmen and intellectuals to assist those struggling for democracy in Cuba. Its secretariat is provided by People in Need, a Czech human rights and development non-profit organization. For more information please refer to www.icdcprague.org and www.peopleinneed.cz.

Some evidence of the complicity between the Communist Party of Argentina and the military dictatorship may be found in a text recently published by a former Communist leader. In one of the documents included in the text we read something like this: "We are sorry for having to advert that by putting forward hypocritical arguments concerning the violation of human rights, the Carter government, which has attributed the Supreme Court the right to judge the rest of the countries in the world, has interfered in our domestic affairs."

Be that as it may, in today's Argentina, more and more convinced supporters of the defence of human rights are adopting an openly critical position on the dictatorship of Fidel Castro. At the same time, more and more of them are condemning both the embargo imposed by the United States and the situation of the prisoners in Guantánamo, the American military. These attitudes coincide with those of the incipient stream of liberal democrats who criticize the role played by the alleged liberals during the military dictatorship, the support of the pro-market establishment to the government of the Peronist president Carlos Menem (including the constitutional amendment allowing presidential re-election) and the conservative right-wing positions on civil liberties.

Therefore, it is nothing strange that both social democrats and liberal democrats alike admire the governments of conciliation in Chile. But unfortunately, in Argentina, as well as in the rest of Latin America, these cases are an exception rather than the rule.

An Internal Issue

On the other hand, there are also cases that are quite different. In some governments, for instance those

of Carlos Menem, Eduardo Duhalde and Néstor Kirchner, human rights in Cuba are obviously politicized for the purposes of domestic affairs. In 1990, with Menem as president and Domingo Cavallo as foreign secretary, Argentina refrained from condemning Cuba in Geneva to later damn the island for its policy of "carnal relationship" with the United States. The worst, however, was to occur with the President Eduardo Duhalde. When Cuba was beaten by a strong

One may find it hard to believe, but in Argentina, many prefer not to condemn a dictatorship like Castro's simply because its main critics are unrepresentable figures. And it is the complicity between the regime of Fidel Castro and the supporters of the Argentinean military regime that makes both sides feel uncomfortable.

wave of repression and three people were shot dead, Argentina changed its condemning vote for one of abstention.

The Kirchner administration can be divided in the ante-Molina and post-Molina period and now that the current government of Argentina has seen the Castrist block concerning the condemnation in Geneva of the military for the violation of human

rights, the relationship between Argentina and Cuba will probably be much colder.

Despite the fact that nowadays this may not sound politically correct, one has to recognize that in recent years, the short government of Fernando de la Rúa maintained the firmest position on the Cuban dictatorship, and paid a huge cost for it within his alliance coalition.

There are many ways in which Argentina can contribute to the transition in Cuba. Argentina may help by searching for truth, justice, memory and reconciliation, and may seek for establishment of a vigorous civil society on the island. With the end of every dictatorship, many truths are revealed and in this case, too, these truths may lead to a mea culpa of many people in Argentina. And the truest thing of all is that the political opening of Cuba will actually help consolidate democracy in Latin America.

Gabriel C. Salvia is the President of the Centre for Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL) www.cadal.org

1 The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo are a group of women whose children and grandchildren were "disappeared" in Argentina. Since its foundation in 1977, it has been searching for over 200 "disappeared" children, some born in clandestine detention centers during the captivity of their mothers or "disappeared" with their parents after being taken into custody by members of the police or security forces.

2 The Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1979 to foster and protect human rights and to strengthen the democratic system and the state of law in Argentina.

ANALYSIS

RELATIONS BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND CUBA

Julio Borges

Presented at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

GIFTS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF HUGO CHÁVEZ TO CUBA AND THE CUBAN REGIME

We believe that all the agreements that Venezuela concluded with other countries to make donations, grant loans or carry out financial or other investments (e.g. service) without any form of repayment or benefit for the republic are “gifts.”

There are a number of considerations that are taken into account when the gifts are counted, but these are mostly based on announcements made by the President Hugo Chávez, or, if there are none, announcements of high-ranking government officials. They are based on ideas reflected in plans and programs of various ministerial portfolios and/or organizations (such as PDVSA, which issues reports on some investments or programs abroad).

Before March 2007 (the date of the last update), the government of Hugo Chávez had spent almost 28 billion US dollars on foreign aid directed to more than 30 countries. Cuba received 7,573,613,000 US dollars; thanks to this, it ranks the first among the countries with the largest donations and/or benefits from the government of Hugo Chávez.

I. INTEGRAL COOPERATION ACCORD BETWEEN CUBA AND VENEZUELA

The Presidents of Venezuela and Cuba, Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro respectively, signed the Integral Cooperation Accord (Acuerdo de Cooperación Integral) on 30 October, 2000. Both governments agreed to create cooperation programs and projects whose implementation involves the participation of public and private institutions in both countries, their universities and non-governmental organizations. According to the agreement, Cuba will provide services and technologies to support the economic and social development program in Venezuela. The cooperation programs will be defined each year and they will include detailed information on the monetary amount, specifications, regulations and forms in which they are to be provided. The goods and services will be paid for by Venezuela according to the world price of oil and its derivatives (exchange of oil for technological and sport support).

This part of the agreement was amended in August 2001 upon the request of the Cuban government. From this date on, Venezuela started to suspend the payments for technical and sports

services received in 2001. As a result of this amendment, Venezuela had to cancel 10 million US dollars.

Although the exchange program was suspended, the Caracas Energy Agreement (Acuerdo Energético de Caracas), by which Venezuela committed to sell 53,000 barrels of oil a day to Cuba under special financing conditions, continued to be properly fulfilled and what is more, the amount destined to Cuba was raised to 92,000 barrels a day in 2004.

SERVICES AND PRODUCTS OFFERED BY VENEZUELA TO CUBA:

Venezuela has committed to providing Cuba with goods and services that involve technical assistance and support given by public and private entities and to supplying to Cuba crude oil and oil derivatives in the amount of 53,000 barrels a day, which was later raised to 92,000 barrels a day. The validity of this contract is five years and it can be extended upon the mutual agreement of both countries. The oil debt is divided in two parts: a short-term debt in hands of PDVSA and a 15-year long long-term debt with a 2% interest rate endorsed by the corporation to the republic as soon as it receives the promissory notes guaranteeing the debt. For each

consignment, Banco Nacional de Cuba issues 15 promissory notes that have a two year grace period and are payable annually apart from the third year.

However, President Hugo Chávez and other governmental representatives have asserted many times that Cuba's payments to Venezuela take the form of medical, sport and educational assistance (exchange). Venezuela is nevertheless obliged to pay for the services provided by such advisors. "The support provided to us by Cuba in healthcare is endless and it cannot be measured in the price of one barrel of oil," said Rafael Ramírez, Minister (08/02/2007).

SERVICES AND PRODUCTS OFFERED BY CUBA TO VENEZUELA:

Sugar Agro-industry

Cuba has offered a technical support and expertise to Venezuela with the aim of contributing to the improvement, modernization and develop-

ment of the system of agro-industrial production of sugar and its derivatives. In this regard, Cuba has promised to participate in the construction of three sugar plants, namely in Barinas (with the capacity of 7,000 tons), Guárico (2,500 tons) and Apure (1,200 tons). Cuba has also agreed to organize postgraduate and training courses for experts in agro-industry and its derivatives.

The result of this contract was disastrous since only one of the three sugar plants that were to be built and were expected to be working by now has been completely finished. Still, it does not produce the expected amount of sugar. The one finished plant is Complejo Agroindustrial Ezequiel Zamora in Barinas, whose construction cost the exchequer as much as 3.32 billion Bolivars. A group of Venezuelan military officers and civilians were accused of fraud along with one Cuban expert; they were immediately driven out of the country and the General Prosecu-

tion Office of Venezuela placed no responsibility on them, even when they were designated by the community as those who have committed corruption.

Tourism

Cuba agreed to provide training to hotel management personnel and other staff employed in tourism, for basic and middle levels with training in the promotion and marketing of tourist services and in quality control related to such services. Cuba has also offered to participate in the establishment of a binational hotel/school in Venezuela and to provide support in promoting and marketing tourist destinations and services.

In March 2007, Venezuela and Cuba agreed to extend the binational agreement (Convenio Integral Binacional) in this field by embarking on two projects: one focusing on the development of tourism in the most important coastal areas and the other aim-

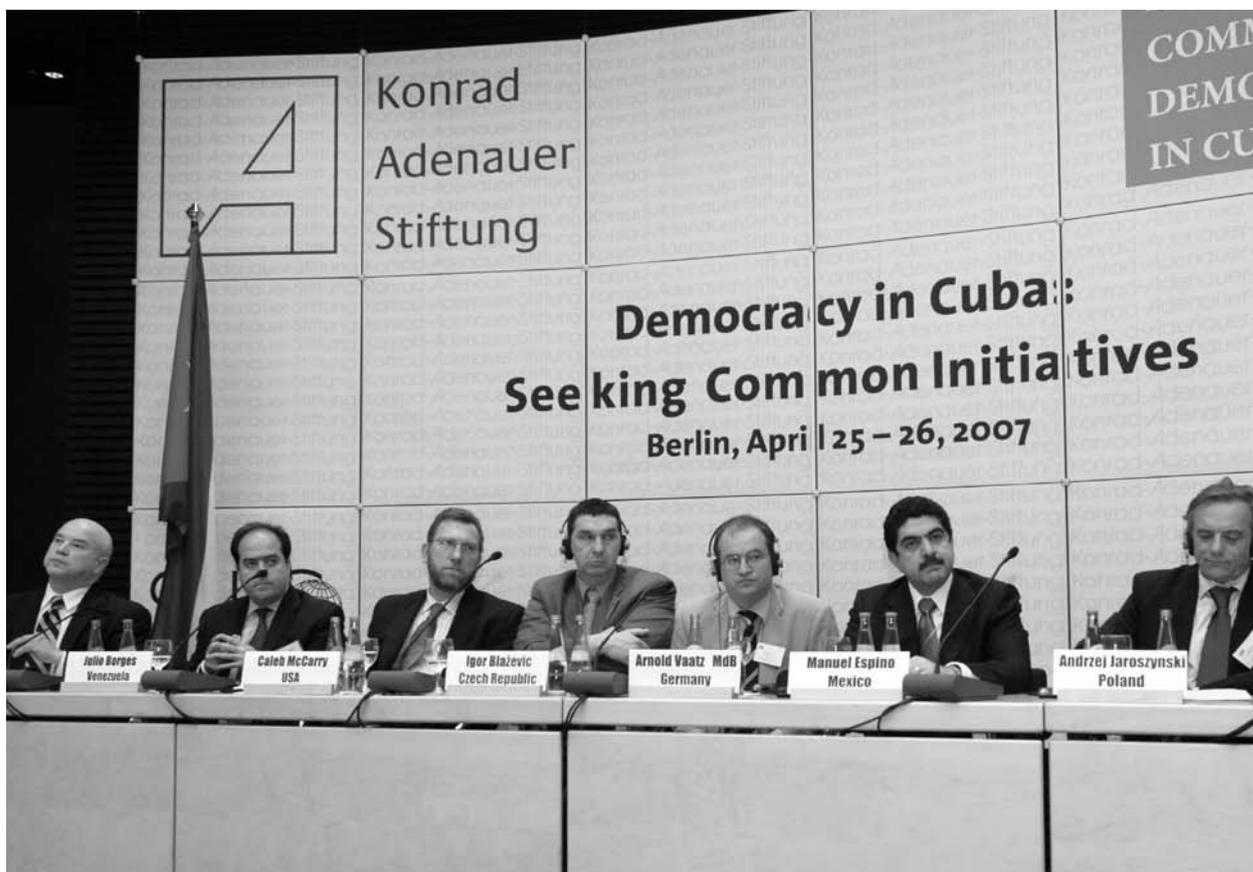


Photo by Lobo

Julio Borges speaking at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

ing at providing trainings to communities and service providers. The agreement on tourism is worth 7.5 billion; its first phase will begin in ten months and requires an investment of 3.5 billion Bolívares.

Agriculture and Food

Technical support projects for the production of various crops for human consumption include: vegetables and plants grown using organoponic farming; projects and technical support for draining and irrigation systems; construction of factories for the production of organic fertilizers; technical assistance in establishing medical production; technical assistance in developing the Special Program for Food Security (Programa Especial de Seguridad Alimentaria - PESA) under the auspices of the FAO; promotion of agrarian and cattle cooperatives; postgraduate courses in Cuba specializing in forestry, agriculture, pig breeding and other fields; and technical support in citrus production.

PESA Project

Even when the general project counted with cultivating 1,000 hectares in Caracas, only two pilot projects for organoponic farming were developed in the city of Caracas: Bolívar I and Bolívar II. They were a total failure. Although Bolívar II is still active, the vegetables and plants it yields are not put on market. The most successful Venezuelan experience in this respect was in the state of Cojedes, where it was possible to grow several of these crops. As for micro-gardens (the system of growing plants in boxes devised for families living in cities), they had a very low impact on urban population. The total investment in the project: was 885,000 US dollars.

In July 2006, Elías Jaua, Minister of Agriculture and Land, announced that 4,000 Cuban experts would

come to Venezuela to assist local farmers with the aim of reducing the costs of agricultural production; 2,000 of them have already come to Venezuela.

The Sale of Products

Cuba has committed to sell to Venezuela generic drugs, vaccinations, pesticides and medical equipment. Of the 106 generic drugs (medicine) that are imported from Cuba, 12 products are of dubious quality and, in spite of the fact that competent authorities have not approved their administration, they are distributed to the public by Misión Barrio Adentro.

On 17 September 2001, the first batch of Cuban medicine and equipment worth 20,681,175 US dollars was delivered to Venezuela. These products were severely criticized by the Venezuelan Medical Federation and by the Venezuelan Network of Scientific Medical Societies, which claimed that a great part of this equipment was obsolete and rather basic from the technological point of view. The National Sanitary Institute (an authority responsible for approving all medicine used in the country) had not approved the medications, some of which were obviously more expensive than similar products offered by other suppliers. The exact amount of medicine that came to Venezuela from Cuba is not known at the moment, neither is the total investment that has been made in this respect.

Transport

Cuba has offered its technical assistance in carrying out projects and works related to the development of the national railway system.

Education

Cuba has committed to provide professional support focusing on the following fields: optimization of education and training of teachers for pre-

school, special, primary, secondary and technical-vocational education and improvement of the education system at these levels and types of schools; consolidation of Bolivarian Schools (Escuelas Bolivarianas); and methodologies for literacy teaching of individuals, groups or through mass communication.

As a result of this agreement, approximately 400 Cuban advisors are currently staying in the country. They are incorporated in different educational missions carried out by the Venezuelan government.

In regards to the conditions of the "Bolivarian Schools" where the intervention of Cuban professionals was really significant, the Ministry of Education and Sport carried out an evaluation through Sinea - Sistema Nacional de Medición y Evaluación del Aprendizaje (National System for Measurement and Evaluation of Learning) in 2003. It was the only evaluation applied to the program of Bolivarian schools (created in 1999) and the first one that the national education system was subjected to by the government. Its results were never published. They reveal that the main objective of the project - to improve the quality of education - has not been achieved.

It is a paradox that the program of Bolivarian Schools, which was created to improve quality, has the lowest scores in the evaluation. An academic proposal cannot consist only of numbers related to the amount of investment and the assumed increase in the number of enrolled students. The Bolivarian Schools, "whose levels can be worse than those of 2003," reflect shortcomings which result from a diversion of the project. The project started with 500 schools. Their whole staff converted to Bolivarian overnight, destroying all educational process that used to be divided in stages, notwithstanding the fact that it used to have political connotations.

Sport

They are sending up to 3,000 managers, other professionals and experts in various sport disciplines and physical education, with the aim to support Venezuela in this field and to contribute to its development. The possibility of training Venezuelan managers, physical education teachers and other sport professionals and experts in Cuba was also considered.

Health Care Services and Staff Training in Cuba

Cuba has committed to offer post-graduate studies in General Medicine; to educate healthcare personnel and other healthcare specialists through intensive courses to contribute to the improvement of healthcare services and extending the scope of healthcare services in isolated areas of Venezuela; treatment of addictions in Cuban therapeutic institutions; specialized medical check-ups and potential therapeutic treatments of Venezuelan oil workers and experts; and other services.

In June 2006, there were 26,600 Cuban doctors in Venezuela (Ricardo Lage, Cuban Vice-President), whom the Venezuelan government not only provided with accommodation and maintenance, but also paid them a salary of between 200 and 400 US dollars.

From the 26,600 doctors in 2006 only 1,400 provided their curricula and accreditations to the Venezuelan College of Doctors.

Only 1,794 Venezuelan doctors were involved in the Misión Barrio Adentro. The President of the College of Doctors justified the number by saying it is an "issue of education."

In March 2007, there were 1,420 Cuban tutors certified at the highest level in General Comprehensive Medicine who were in charge of training of 1,023 Venezuelan general practitioners (recently graduated,

in only two and a half years). Even though Dr. Fernando Biando (Colegio de Médicos del Distrito Metropolitano de Caracas) assured us in 2006 that these physicians would gradually substitute the Cuban doctors, in 2007 he said: "there are no plans to substitute them for now since general practitioners will fill vacant positions in Venezuelan primary health care."

In April 2007, the Latin American School of Medical Sciences (ELAM) was opened in Venezuela where the first cohort of 631 Latin Ameri-

Some of these doctors have reported that they were mistreated by their Cuban supervisors who forbade them to go out of their flats after 5 pm and forced them to falsify medical histories in order to exaggerate the statistical data.

can students including 100 Cubans is going to study. The aim of this project is to educate 200,000 general practitioners from Latin America and the Caribbean in ten years. The amount that the country is going to invest in the project in order to fulfil its objective is not known yet, but the costs of purchasing the buildings have so far reached 18 billion Bolivars. What is more, the students will receive free education, learning material, accommodation, food and a maintenance bonus after they gain the degree.

On 30 November, 2000, the first flight from Venezuela to Cuba was dispatched within the Program of Treatment of Venezuelan Patients in Cuba. 14,539 patients and 11,675 companions have been attended so far. Nevertheless, a great part of the treatments that these patients undergo costs Venezuela more than it would cost if these patients were treated in the country.

The organization Solidaridad Sin Fronteras – SSF (Solidarity without Borders) claims that about 500 Cuban doctors from Misión Barrio Adentro have fled from Venezuela. Some of these doctors have reported that, among other things, they were mistreated by their Cuban supervisors who forbade them to go out of their flats after 5 pm and forced them to falsify medical histories in order to exaggerate the statistical data; some doctors were treated as prisoners for trying to escape; treatment was provided to Colombian guerrilla fighters wounded along the frontier; there were 10,000 Cuban security agents, policemen and soldiers appointed to the mission to provide protection and track Cuban doctors who are in the country.

II. THE BOLIVARIAN ALTERNATIVE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARRIBEAN (ALBA)

The joint declaration on the ALBA was signed by the President Hugo Chávez and his Cuban counterpart in the city of La Habana, Cuba, on 14 December 2004.

The Following Facts are The Most Important

- In March 2007, only 307 CDIs, 406 SRIs and 11 CATs in the whole country had started to operate.
- Education of 40,000 doctors and 5,000 experts in medical technolo-

gies in Venezuela within Programa Barrio Adentro II.

- 100,000 surgical interventions to Venezuelan patients in 2005. Until August 2005, only 50,000 Venezuelans had received treatment in this respect while in the *Compromiso Sandino*, an agreement that the countries signed in August 2005, 315,000 Latin Americans had attended both Venezuelan and Cuban ophthalmologic centres.
- Education in Cuba was provided to 10,000 bachelors who completed *Misión Ribas* with a specialization in Medicine and Nursing.
- The provision of health care to Venezuelan patients in Cuba.

OTHER AGREEMENTS WITHIN THE ALBA

Energy Revolution Mission

In November 2006, the Energy Revolution Mission was started within the ALBA. Its first stage involved the substitution of 52 million light bulbs; the final step was the installation of devices for the generation of 1000 MW.

Out of the 2,791 brigadiers who provided support to this mission in its first stage, 1,193 were Cuban “social workers” and 1,598 were Venezuelans. When the mission was in progress, they received a maintenance bonus and Venezuela saw to it that they were given accommodation during their stay.

In some of the country’s states, a series of frauds occurred in connection with this bulb mission. Light bulbs were sometimes sold to communities or companies. What is more, Cuban “social workers” left on 13 April 2007, without meeting the objective to substitute 52 million bulbs.

But the Description of the Most Serious Fact is Still to Follow.

- One of the most important factories manufacturing energy-saving bulbs

in China received an order from Venezuela to produce bulbs worth 100 million dollars. They were sent directly to Cuba to make sure that the promise of the President Hugo Chávez to “illuminate the island as a lighthouse, as a lighthouse that equals Fidel, a lighthouse that has illuminated me” is fulfilled. The amount of purchased bulbs was much higher than needed and the surplus was then sold, by Cuba, to other Caribbean islands and even to our country.

- This is the Energy Mission, an enormous expenditure drawn from our budget. What is more, a new purchase was made worth 150 million dollars was paid to Vietnam. The consignment was sent to Cuba and it is equivalent to a 5 – 6 years’ consumption of bulbs in Venezuela. The products that were sent to Venezuela are overpriced.

It is hard to establish the exact number of Cubans in Venezuela due to the lack of reliable sources of information. Conclusions from our research estimate that 34,767 Cubans have thus far been operating in Venezuela. Venezuela provides the majority of them housing and regular salary, which in some cases is up to 400 US dollars.

III. OTHER INTERESTING AGREEMENTS

An Agreement on Help in Penal Matters

This agreement was signed by the government of Venezuela and Cuba and published in the *Official Gazette* on 22 December 2004.

The danger lies in the pronounced difference between the Cuban and the Venezuelan penal systems – for example, the use of death penalty in Cuba and its abolition in Venezuela. Therefore, are there any guarantees for Venezuelans interrogated in Cuba for crimes; punished or deprived of liberty? Are there any guarantees

for the possibilities put forward in the agreement? The text of the agreement is very general and the agreement is not limited to providing support while carrying out the investigation but allows interventions when the crimes in question are not considered crimes according to the legislation of one of the two countries.

IV. TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBA AND VENEZUELA

Cuba presently trades with approximately 170 countries around the world. Cuban exports depend to a great extent on its traditional products. Only six of them (sugar, nickel, tobacco, seafood, coffee and rum) form about 80% of its exports.

On the other hand, 75% of the trade exchange is formed by imports, whose main part is fuel and oil, food, machines and chemical equipment and products.

Latin America and the Caribbean have the leading position, forming 73% of the total exchange (which was even exceeded in 2005). From the countries in this area it is the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that has again started to rank number one among the Cuban trade partners as a result of the various agreements signed by both countries in adherence to the ALBA principles.

80% of the trade balance between the two countries is formed with Cuban purchases of Venezuelan goods and services. It is expected that for 2007, the government of Venezuela hopes to triple the exports of Venezuelan products and services to Cuba. Goods and services include mainly construction materials, confectionery, shoes, textiles and chemical products plus the much valued 90,000 barrels of oil a day.

Although the trade relations between Venezuela and Cuba are now at their peak, the situation was different in past. In 1998 and before, the average trade exchange between these two countries was 450 million US dollars, of which the exports from Cuba to Venezuela hardly reached around one million dollars.

This situation changed after Hugo Chávez was elected President of

Venezuela. He cultivates a friendly and very close relationship with his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro. The Integral Cooperation Accord signed in October 2000 sealed the beginning of mutual trade exchange that is still on the increase. From 2000 to 2006 it grew from 902 million dollars to 2.64 million dollars, which is a 190% increase when compared to 2000 and a 480% increase when compared to the period before Hugo Chávez was elected President.

This research has been conducted by Primero Justicia Party (Justice First) and presented by Julio Borges at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007. For an unabridged version please refer to www.cubalog.eu.

Julio Andrés Borges, a Venezuelan lawyer, founded the civil organization Primero Justicia in 1992. It is now one of the biggest opposition parties in Venezuela. He was the party's candidate for president but stepped down from elections for the benefit of the opposition's common candidate.

THE TRANSITIONAL MENU

Fredo Ariás-King

WHICH PATH CAN CUBA CHOOSE FROM THE LATIN AMERICAN TRANSITIONS?

The current Cuban economic and political model seems to be lacking dignity. For years now, no respect has been shown by both common people and the elite, the latter using repression rather than ideology to delay the inevitable. One day when Cuban reformers (both those living in the country and those from abroad) start to think of foreign models for the changes ahead of Cuba, where will they turn to? Since the Cuban regime is a classic example of a Soviet-type socialist dictatorship, it would be logical to study the processes of change in Eastern Europe (some of them being highly successful). However, keeping

in mind the Cuban geographic area and its natural, cultural and linguistic affinity, some reformers will be surely more inclined to look for inspiration in Latin America.

Unlike Eastern Europe, there are unfortunately no model countries in Latin America (with the exception of Chile), although various aspects of reforms carried out in these countries – carefully picked as in a salad bar – can prove useful in Cuban democratic future.

Let's look at the menu of what we have to choose from.

Brazil has demonstrated that by opening the country to foreign investors, the economy can experience periods

of advanced growth and industrialization. In the 1950s, when traditional political models were just the opposite, the democratically elected president Juscelino Kubitschek had a political vision of Brazil's opening to the world and succeeded in putting the country on the industrial map. After that, Brazil was lead by several dictatorial and corrupt governments until Fernando Henrique Cardoso managed to transform the irresponsible populist left wing to a modern party and proved that inflation control measures mainly benefit the working and the middle class. However, it did not prevent an overt ally of Cuban dictatorship to be elected the next president (although the new president could not dismantle the positive aspects of the previous reforms).

Mexico is living proof of how a country with an advantageous geographic location, natural resources and markets open to the world can be incompetently administered by a single party. The “democrats” were bought off and controlled by a group of oligarchs who destroyed value while becoming some of the richest people in the world through monopoly concessions. It is the excessively strong role of the state and a hostile attitude towards entrepreneurship that can explain why half of the people live below the poverty line and why there is a constant flow of people leaving the country. One of the few positive things that Cuba can learn from Mexico is that, despite its importance, Mexico does not aspire to be an ambitious and self-destructive geopolitical role and that the commercial opening of the country has saved the country from becoming even poorer. What Cubans can also learn from Mexico is that democracy brings better results than

dictatorship and that civil society can be mobilized to put an end to a one-party dictatorship.

Argentina has lived a history of economic and political ups and downs that can show important lessons to be learned. The main lesson is that a country whose economy is prudently managed using neo-classical theory models and whose politics is governed by constitutionality and modesty can be transformed back to the world power it used to be in the 1920s. It was the country’s deviation from constitutionality during and immediately after the presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen that made Argentina suffer irreversible decline. High financial deficits, an excessively strong role of the state, bureaucracy, centralism, populism, Peronism and lack of monetary, fiscal and commercial coherence as well as insufficient homogeneity of proprietary rights and public politics have condemned Argentina to several decades of decay

and seclusion. It is instructive to look at the parallel with Cuban “golden age” of constitutionality and prosperity followed by a collapse caused by the messianic “easy route.”

Peru has proven wrong the popular belief that democratic regimes cannot take harsh measures if it is necessary to reform a country governed by special interests that stand in the way of progress. Some of the greatest deeds of Alberto Fujimori were performed when he governed the country as the president elect, assisted by a sufficiently healthy socio-political movement (Cambio 90) – before his coup, before Vladimiro Montesinos and before he went mad. His economic reforms (privatizations, opening the market and decentralization) brought triumph and his successor Alejandro Toledo did not revoke them. However, what the publicly elected Toledo rejected was the collaborator networks created during Fujimori’s political era. He purged the army and the legal system, revealed



Photo by Pavel Hrach

Havana

which legislators were bribed by Montesinos and maintained pressure. The country has seen a relatively high rate of growth sustaining its constitutional regime.

The situation in **Colombia** should encourage the regional democratic right wing since it has shown that a political power that promises to act firmly against guerillas and drug trafficking, responsibly manages the economy and is a United States ally, can not only be successful in elections but can also be highly popular. Colombian president Álvaro Uribe has confirmed the truth of the words of the first Czechoslovakian President Tomáš Masaryk by saying: "The fact that a democratic regime is democratic does not mean that it is toothless." People are often disappointed with democratic regimes in Latin America due to the incompetence of a particular democratic leader rather than due to democracy itself. Uribe sets a good example by showing that a democratic regime has all the tools necessary to reorganize the country and take tough measures, which will be in the end welcomed by common people: "Firm hand, big heart."

Chile is one of the group's success stories. However, its success is surrounded by myths that can prove to be counterproductive. Although Chile has tripled its actual wealth in the last three decades, the success cannot be attributed to Augusto Pinochet but to a radical liberal economic model with an outstanding public policy. What remains unknown regarding this success is that in the last 17 years Chilean democratic governments managed to lower the poverty line from some 40% to the current 12%, without the need to change the "neo-liberal" model which would not be possible if the regime of Pinochet continued.

Venezuela is implementing an economic policy that has already ruined

more than one country in the region. When this bubble bursts, it will likely be similar to the situation in Mexico in 1982. By then the damage will have spread to places further behind the frontier because it sponsors anti-constitutional and antidemocratic elements in the whole region. The reason for this is that the country has not seen anything much better before – if we consider the case Mexico and its one-party dictatorship, we could say that Venezuela has been governed by a kind of two-headed PRI (Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party):

Chile is one of the group's success stories. In the last 17 years Chilean democratic governments managed to lower the poverty line from some 40% to the current 12%

two parties share power, oil riches and the privileges. The elites failed to act and did not respond to the needs of the country. In such conditions, a leader who would promise to put an end to all of this could count on genuine popular support. Venezuela has proved that holding elections is not a sufficient means of guaranteeing democracy and that election can bury a democratic regime if it benefits only the governing elites.

Central America has also seen political practices, for better and for worse. In brief, El Salvador is an example of how a country can resist guerillas when protected from abroad, successfully recover from the traumas of a near civil war and moreover adopt profound economical reforms, which

are appreciated by the population. The party that introduced them has been reelected several times with the neo-communist opposition unable to conquer the power in elections.

Counter to this example is **Nicaragua**, where the transition was deeply ineffective. The residual effects from Daniel Ortega's regime were not purged from the government after his electoral defeat in 1990, and for this reason (and due to the usual lack of unity in the opposition) they were able to return to power recently. Nicaragua's model is the most appropriate for the Cubans: if, during their transition, they do the same as what Violeta Chamorro did, they could face a return of the communists in a few years.

All things considered, Latin America is – after Africa – the region with the lowest level of economic dynamism in the world and suffers from high rates of poverty and marginalization, recent instances of democratic standards infringement, geopolitical confusion and an identity crisis. The majority of its leaders are incompetent, illegitimate or corrupt. More often, they are a combination of all three. However, great leaders do appear from time to time.

Fredo Arias-King is the founder of the academic quad-monthly magazine "Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of the Post-Soviet Democratization" published since 1992 in Washington. Between March 1999 and July 2000 he was a foreign affairs counselor for the Mexican party National Action Party (PAN). He also worked as a counselor of the democratic forces in Moldavia, Russia, Peru, Cuba, Belarus and the Ukraine. He writes about transitions to democracy and he has published two books – the second one, "Transitions: Eastern European Experience" was published by CADAL in Buenos Aires in 2005.

A TRIP TO THE REAL CUBA AND FOUR LESSONS FROM CHILE

Rodolfo Samuel Seguel Molina

For many years I wanted to visit Cuba. I was actually invited on several occasions, even by Fidel Castro himself. But I was always reluctant to go there, since I did not want to be accused of being a “puppet” of the communists. We were fighting Pincho’s dictatorship and I did not want anyone to think that we were listening to someone’s orders. What we were motivated by was the need to be free and to put an end to the fear of death and persecution that our people were suffering from.

Now, I am 53 and I live in a wonderful democratic country where there is respect for human rights and liberties. In today’s Chile you are allowed to have your own opinion, make choices, elect your politicians, speak, meet with other people or travel, and these freedoms may not be withheld from you.

In May 2007 I accepted the invitation to Cuba and for the first time in my life I travelled to the island to see what it was like. I wished to know the Cuba of common people, not the Cuba of a tourist who comes for his holiday to relax or who thinks that the island is a brothel for satisfying his primary instincts.

I arrived and the reality I met exceeded my imagination. Cuban people live

under a dictatorship which terrifies them and makes them numb, paralysed and subjugated, and at this moment, they are left with no possibility of getting free. After almost 50 years, the dictatorial opprobrium is embedded in practically all generations and people accept the regime – either because they are afraid or because they do not know what democracy means. However, life should not be like this and we should do something for them. It is as if we were doing it for ourselves, because they are our brothers and sisters and we have to help them the same way as we were once helped. This is an inevitable mission of any advocate of democratic principles.

Is there any politician – president, prime minister, senator, member of parliament, councillor or other – who would not remember the ordeal provoked by criminals such as Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Pinochet, Ferdinando Marcos, Gadafi, Stalin, Idi Amin or Hussein who all used weapons to seize power and to satisfy their nefarious instincts, and who subjugated their people, presenting themselves as the “Great Saviours” of humanity?

Dear friends, to help Cuba we have to be brave and we always have to bear in mind that Fidel Castro is a dictator and that Cuban people live under a

dictatorship. To help our brothers and sisters we need to fight very hard, and that is why I would like to remember how we started our campaign against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile:

1. There were always politicians exiled abroad who kept on denouncing throughout the world what was happening in our country, and these politicians received support from foreign governments. However, the case of the Cubans who leave the island for dollar exile is different, as I have not seen any of them acting. Where are they?
2. In Chile, notwithstanding the political party to which we belonged, we were all united in a common cause, fighting the dictatorship by peaceful means, not with weapons. Our supporters were of different philosophies, ranging from Communists to Christian Democrats, and our unity made us a strong rival of the dictatorship. We cannot see any unity in Cuba though. The opposition leaders on the island lack support, especially Oswaldo Payá and the Varela Project. And the brave women who still continue their Sunday marches, every week at eleven o’clock after the morning mass, also deserve help.
3. All the workers from around Chile joined forces and were followed by

university students, by Women for Life and by the very poor. We decided to create the Civic Assembly and the politicians formed the Democratic Alliance. The Catholic Church played a key role; later, Protestant Churches did too. Undoubtedly, a great deal of work must be done to achieve this and great dedication is needed. It is also very important to cooperate with democrats from other countries of the world. If European and US politicians pledge to cooperate, sooner or later we will see the people of Cuba well organized, leading their peaceful campaign against Castro's dictatorship.

4. All democratic countries of the world offered Chile their selfless help by making resolutions and agreements and by pronouncing official declarations. We also had financial help, we received visits from abroad and were invited to other countries. I personally met with the Pope John Paul II and with several presidents, kings, prime ministers, MPs and

senators. And in the meantime, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, World Social Forum and World Confederation of Labour never failed to provide us support. Therefore, special political decisions must be taken, otherwise our friends in Cuba will not be helped.

We have to grasp the whole situation once and for all. Even if Castro dies, Cuban people will not free themselves from the dictatorship without our help. At this moment, they are not united and they lack political and social support from democratic countries. We are free citizens and advocates of democratic principles and it is us, who must help Cuba.

I am happy living in Chile, because it is a free and democratic country and my nation has everything I was dreaming about. Nonetheless, this does not free me from the responsibility I have as a democrat. I cannot remain reticent and be blind to the horrors lived by

the people in Cuba. How can it be that Fidel Castro walks around the world as a "Great Revolutionist" and no one, except honourable exceptions, tells him anything? How can it be that he is received as a statesman when he always wears his olive green uniform stained with blood, famine, prostitution and oppression?

Let us help Cuba to be free like Chile and Europe. If my brothers and sisters are free, I too will feel freer. And if they are tied, I too will feel tied.

Rodolfo Samuel Seguel Molina is a Chilean trade union leader who played a major role in opposing the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.



Photo by Lobo

Family of a Cuban political prisoner

THE MARTÍ PLAN FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

Luis Alberto Lacalle

Speech at the ICDC Conference in Berlin, April 2007

Once the dictatorship has fallen and Cuba continues its democratic journey, an enormous effort will be necessary in order to transform Cuba to a free and prosperous nation.

The “Martí Plan” aims to support the process with economic and human resources through coordination of activities carried out by international actors, Cubans who live in the island and those who live in “the Pilgrim Homeland.”

It will be necessary to offer economic contributions and technical aid consisting of the introduction of knowledge and business and trade union experience, which will channel the everyday life of a nation that during 50 years has known neither liberty nor justice.

It is essential to remember and to make clear the fact that the Cubans are the only ones able to undertake the task. They and their democratic government will carry out the changes; the cooperating actors, be it nations, institutions or individu-

als, will act only when asked by legitimate representatives of the Cuban population.

In this introduction, a special mention must be made of the phenomenon of exile. During the last half century, without similar precedent, thousands of compatriots were separated; new generations were born and grew up loving and yearning for country they do not know. Others remained in their native land, suffering under tyranny. All of them are Cubans and all of them can and should contribute to the reconstruction process. Having in mind this aspect, the “Martí Plan” wishes to combine all the contributions and to connect and bring closer together those who were separated for so long.

THE PLAN'S SUMMARY

The plan proposes two types of contributions:

- a) **Economic**, which comprises financial resources, technological support and commercial opportunities.
- b) **Human**, including creation of leadership structures (leading officials) and training opportunities.

The concepts are explained in more detail below:

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

Destruction of Cuba's economic base created by the tyranny will require economic recourse and legal and cultural measures that will establish a modern society.

Reconstruction fund

This is a body of public international right with limited duration of existence. It will centralize contributions from different sources.

The aid will be reciprocal, aiming at creating private culture and initiative with its rights and duties. Loan installments and interest rates will be as generous as possible. However, the loan shall be properly paid back. Loan repayments, once offered, will be used as donations to the education and public health system.

One part of the fund resources will be donated to educational and health institutions that will submit specific projects. The fund will be lead by a

board of directors made up of important people from around the world and will be managed by a director with experience in the finance sector.

The contributions will be free or onerous, provided by governments, public or private entities or individuals.

The aim of the support will be to establish democratic government in Cuba. Its contributions will be offered to public entities (central and local government, public personages of the state) or to private corporations.

HUMAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Technical Assistance Fund

The introduction of knowledge and experience in public and private life represents a central point of the task that awaits us.

In the public sector, technical support will be offered to improve the constitutional and administrative area and help organize political parties and trade unions. However, it will be done only after the Cuban government has requested it.

In the private sector, a list of persons with business experience will be offered to companies and business organizations that will have the chance to request these people. This activity will be free in terms of personal rewards. The assistance will last, at most, as long as the "Martí Plan" is valid.

DURATION

The duration of the "Martí Plan" will be limited, announced beforehand and its end will not be postponed. Its aim is to help, to create an impulse, but it can not replace authentic public and private action.

Once it fulfills its duties, the initiative will disappear. If its contribution helps to create freer, more prosperous and fair Cuba, its goal will be fully achieved.

Luis Alberto Lacalle, President of Uruguay from 1990-95, Senator from 1984 and Vice-President of the Senate, was instrumental in organizing the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) for the OAS countries. He is an active member of the Interantional Committee for Democracy in Cuba.



Photo by Labo

Luis Alberto Lacalle and Václav Havel at the ICDC conference in Berlin

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR CUBA AND MEXICO

Manuel Espino

Speech at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

I would only like to point this out that from the Mexican point of view, and I dare to say in the Latin American view as well, because I have the honor of being the President of the National Action Party (PAN) – which is the governing party for the second time in a row after a very long, hard and painful experience of state authoritarianism – and also the honor of being the president of the Christian Democrat Organization of America. Therefore, in the Mexican point of view, and I think in the Latin American as well, we can see that our Latin American region is experiencing a crucial moment. The current process brought by the change of eras certainly offers many unforeseen and surprising opportunities for us to come out of marginalization and overcome the institutional weakness that is present in all Latin America. Through these processes we will be able to develop into an integrated, modern, politically stable, socially developed and economically competitive region.

NEW IDEOLOGICAL CONFRONTATIONS

Now, in this time of a change of eras, we should also stress the importance of what is soon to happen in Cuba. The opportunities in Latin America will mostly depend on the Cuban process of transformation which is undoubtedly related to an event that seems to be quite imminent.

Sometimes I do not believe it anymore; we have thought that Castro was to

leave very soon for a very long time. In my country, we have a song that says because you stay, and you go, you go, you go, and go, but you are still here! But we still believe he will leave very soon. Once this happens, we will have to act in very clever and politically very responsible way in order to make sure that the events taking place in Cuba will be in the interests of the entire Latin American region.

Together with these opportunities, there are people in Latin America who want to revive the old ideological confrontations which caused a lot of damage to the region. The Europeans have a great amount of experience with that. The ideological confrontations led to wars that caused a considerable damage not only to Europe but to all mankind. However, these days there are many who insist on confrontations, on reviving this old antagonism that harms humanity. I would like to mention the specific example of Chavez to illustrate what occurs in Latin America nowadays. Chavez is becoming a leading representative of this attempt to revive the ideological confrontations in Latin America, evoking, with his activities, a lot of what Fidel Castro was doing for decades. I also chose to mention Chavez because it seems to me we cannot discuss Cuba these days without relating it to Chavez. There is a dangerous symbiosis, a close relationship between Fidel and Chavez, between the Venezuelan and Cuban government. As for what is going to take place in Cuba, if we do not pay proper

attention to it; the only thing we are likely to see is the Castro's ideological and political leadership spreading as a school of thought to the Latin American region. We see that happening in the case of Venezuela.

Therefore, we have a great opportunity, but I point out that this depends on us making the right decisions. In order to avoid any mistakes, I believe we should first ratify approaches that have been presented here so insistently; the commitment to let the Cubans decide on their own what they want Cuba to be like in the near future. I believe it is beneficial for them to know that there are many of us interested in the restoration of an open and democratic Cuban system that will fully respect human rights.

We have a deep interest in contributing to the democratic institutions that will provide for a system of political parties that truly compete for government on the island, a system that will not be a mere simulation of democracy, as the one that exists in Cuba today. It is also important for Cubans to see that we are willing to promote dialogue as the most effective way to make different actors stand in favor of an agreement that will benefit the island.

DO NOT EUROPEANIZE OR LATIN AMERICANIZE

Currently there are various projects and programs designed to benefit

the Cuban nation. However, some projects compete among themselves, and some authors of these projects, programs and positive proposals refuse to accept the positive aspects of other proposals. I believe we, who are not Cubans, should now immediately, through a dialogue, encourage an agreement between the authors and promoters of different programs. The Varela Project, for example, is in my opinion, an extraordinary project that could be empowered and further inspired by proposals made by other programs. Since different visions with different projects will lead to different, potentially uncoordinated actions, the most urgent task is to coordinate the effort of all actors involved and to make sure we resist the temptation to promote our own successful model as the only recipe that might lead to success in Cuba as well. Neither the Polish recipe, nor the German recipe, nor the recipe that has been recently successful in Mexico has to be the successful approach for Cuba. We have to be generous enough to share our experi-

ence so the Cubans can decide which experience could be useful and used for their own nation.

I also believe it is essential to insist that the generous efforts of many world organizations that have been involved in the Cuban issue and in gathering financial resources to support various projects remain generous and do not seek rewards when they turn the projects over to the Cuban people. To be honest, we, in Latin America like, for example, to see North American organizations providing help in different Latin American issues, but we do not much like it when they start asking for things in exchange. In my opinion we should not try to North Americanize or Europeanize or Latin Americanize the Cuban nation. We have to let Cuba be Cuba, on its own, with the generous and altruistic support of various organizations, governments, parties and leading figures of the world. We have to let the Cubans decide, absolutely freely, on what they want to do with their country. I would only insist on my personal attitude, as the President of the Nation-

al Action Party of Mexico, and as the President of the CDOA in Latin America and the Caribbean, if I were sure I am not wrong. I also want to point out the Mexican president committed himself to support the suffering nations of Latin America, nowadays mainly Cuba and Venezuela. I would also like to mention again the commitment of the CDOA that recently managed to publicly commit the former Mexican President Vicente Fox to get involved in the Cuban and Venezuelan issues. I would like to remark that Fox, during his presidency of Mexico, was the only head of state with different attitude towards Castro and Chavez, stating clearly his disapproval of the oppression of their nations. Vicente Fox has now joined the CDOA project as well, having one particular mission – to manage world support for Cuba and Venezuela and to bring together Latin American leaders who wish to commit themselves to this mission.

Manuel Espino is President of the Mexican National Action Party (PAN) and President of the Christian Democrat Organization of America.



Photo by Lobo

Manuel Espino at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR THE US AND LATIN AMERICA?

Jaime Trobo

Speech at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

If Cuba is to be incorporated as a tolerant and democratic society into the international community, its people need help. And the aim to accompany Cuba on its way to democracy is what we are encouraged by. Who is the opponent of this great intention? Undoubtedly it is the dictatorial regime that strictly restricts the liberties of its citizens. One of the main tasks of the dictatorship is to perpetuate itself in power, and that is why it makes use of an expedient diplomacy, which has been serving its purpose for 50 years, and of a military and police intelligence that carries out its duty without any prejudice or limits. A part of the mission of these two government authorities has been to divide the internal opposition, crush the dissent and split international public opinion on the approach towards the present and the future of Cuba.

I have no doubt that the differences in the common position of Europe on this issue are a result of the effective actions of Cuban diplomacy and intelligence. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain why the infringement of liberties and the violation of human rights are not firmly condemned.

CUBA AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Let me now draw three circles that would cover the relations between Cuba and the international community.

The first circle is a delineation of the relationship with Latin America. This part of the American continent is deeply indebted to the nation of Cuba because it has been the chief supporter of the Cuban dictatorship on the international scene. The left-wing streams of Latin America have protected the regime. By its strategy of presenting itself as the "victim" of imperialism, Cuba has gained their unconditional support and this support has helped hide its gross and continued violations of human rights. In Latin America, it is very difficult to raise greater awareness and to create space for criticism. I have just arrived from a meeting of the Commission on Human Rights of the Latin American Parliament in Panama. This Commission has been reported of several complaints by Cuban political prisoners or by their family members, and it has also been submitted a request by the family of Hilda Molina, who

asks for support in order to be granted a permission to travel abroad. Moreover, the Commission now has at its disposal a complete report on human rights in Cuba, prepared by the Cuban Democratic Directory, and in spite of all this, it is very difficult to reach consensus on pointing out the responsibility of the government and on requesting that the human rights be respected. At the last Latin American Summits, no country came with the topic of Cuba and its failure to comply with its international commitments, for instance with the Viña del Mar declaration about governability and democracy.

The role of Latin America is of great importance and therefore it is necessary to work hard in order to ensure that its political elite is given objective information and becomes more engaged in a situation that will change soon. And if the Latin American commitment is to be enhanced, the information provided has to reflect very effectively the real state of affairs on the island.

I think that in Latin America there is a great deal of work left. The opposition and the dissent have to be introduced

and presented as a democratic option calling for liberty and for the introduction of democracy.

The second circle would undoubtedly cover the United States, whose relationship with the Cuban reality can in no way be denied. I believe that by making Latin America be more engaged in the freedom on the island, we could achieve a certain balance that would somehow minimize the risk of the United States solving the future of Cuba on its own. This is what makes many people concerned and is also what the dictatorship uses very well for its own advantage. The United States, which has recently reopened its dialogue with some countries in the region, has to include in its agenda the talks about their commitment to democracy in Cuba. Those who are ready to introduce the essential issue of transition to democracy into their debates with the Cuban government are Mexico, Brazil, Chile and even Uruguay.

Quite often, the United States tends to come with important news concerning Cuba; however, this news is not usually well reported and there are always doubts as to whether the primary decisions are not influenced by political circumstances and purposes, such as, for instance, upcoming elections. And other times, it is the Cuban dictatorship itself who arranges for the dissemination of similar information, because this fits perfectly with the historical scheme in which Cuba stands for the victim of imperialism. What is astonishing is that while the United States sells Cuba foodstuffs for more than 300 hundred million dollars which the island pays in cash, the international public opinion still accepts Cuba's complaints against the embargo and the blocking. The United States needs to speak more about the future, about what it will do to support the island when it is free, rather than to speak about what is happening there now.

I am quite positive that if the US government openly expressed its commitment to revert Guantánamo back to Cuban sovereignty, provided there is democracy restored on the island, it could bring about a very important and dramatic effect. The fulfilment of an historical request by Cuba would undoubtedly be a great pledge that, from now on, can be associated with freedom, democracy and human rights on the island.

The third circle, which from my point of view is also very important, covers Europe. The cultural proximity, the space for investment and the interest to find its own position in another country of the region may, too, play a decisive role in the request for the freedom of Cuba. Europe, with its legitimate democracies, should get very actively involved in the restoration of democracy in Cuba. However, a conflict of interests, chiefly economic ones, and a remote understanding of the everyday hardship of Cuban people have conspired against Europe. The continent has lost the prominent role it might have played.

Undoubtedly, the democratic countries of Latin America, the United States and Europe all want Cuba to be a good and worthy partner, and the only way how to achieve this is to make the regime feel isolated and to show support to the opposition.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WE SUGGEST?

We have been asked to suggest some measures that would help to incorporate Cuba into the democratic international community.

What I believe to be of great importance is the creation of an information system which would continuously provide news to the leaders of other countries. The information should be short,

easily accessible and should constantly focus on the opposition and the dissidents. The regime has the door open; the members of the opposition need someone to open the door for them, too. On the stage there has to appear a trustworthy and reliable interlocutor, and that is what the opposition surely is.

I think that the opposition and the dissidents have to launch an intensive campaign to present themselves to the Latin American politicians. They do so quite often in the United States and in Europe and are relatively successful; however, it is essential they launch similar campaigns in the countries of the first circle. Moreover, I believe the public opinion could be very much influenced, if the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba organized a meeting of its prominent members in Latin America. Such a meeting may really be very important.

I think no effort should be spared to associate the supporters of free Cuba from the different parliaments in a special group. The group should include representatives of Latin American countries, the United States and Europe and these representatives should regularly express their support of democracy and call for the respect of human rights. They should do so at parliamentary sessions, in international organizations and in other spheres of interest.

The opposition and the new generation of the military, that nowadays has half of the responsibility, should be provided all necessary information and be made aware of the role they can play in the transition.

The economic support of the regime comes from two sources – from Hugo Chávez and from the international companies which have their investments in Cuba. The former, who is fully attached to the ideas of totalitarian-

ism, is interested in the persistence of the dictatorship. The case of the latter, however, is astonishing. Companies of European origin are very concerned for their good reputation, they care for the environment and apply all their quality standards for the advantage of their clients and consumers, yet they feel in no way committed to make any moral judgements concerning human rights, freedom and democracy in the country where they run their business. The environment and the quality are more important than human beings and their rights, and this must change.

The main obstacle for the success of these measures is the fact that the support of the opposition is not shown on a regular basis, and the same happens with the calls for the liberties and with the demands made on the regime. The dictatorship, on the other hand, is in a permanent action, organized by authorities used to disinformation and is very active with diplomacy. Currently, there is a great deal of intensive work being done not just to provide for the survival of the regime, but also for the

consolidation of power in the hands of Raúl Castro. If there are many individuals in the international community who want to help Cuba to be free, they have to work as intensively and systematically as the regime.

The succession has to be challenged and the regime has to be adverted so that under certain circumstances, the successor would not be recognized. It is no secret that everything is being arranged so that the dictatorship can continue and the international public opinion is being systematically prepared for it.

Moreover, the new Commission on Human Rights has to take action without any hesitation. And the OAS, in accordance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, has to start organizing support for free elections so that Cuba can be re-integrated into the American democratic community.

I believe that in recent years we have seen many achievements. There is an international community which is inter-

ested in the situation of Cuba. This International Committee has made many individuals committed to the issue. The opponents of the regime have created a joint network of their common objectives in a simple and brief platform which calls for freedom, for the respect of human rights and for the right to have a say in the future of their country. This is a great achievement and the opposition deserves our congratulations. We believe that in the future, their platform will have a significant impact on the internal situation of Cuba.

Nevertheless, the Cuban people who desire freedom certainly need help from the international community. If there had been no strain by the international community in the times of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, those regimes would have lasted much longer.

*Jaime Trobo, Member of Parliament
(Partido Nacional), Uruguay.*



Photo by Lobo

Jaime Trobo at the ICDC conference in Berlin, April 2007

THE MEXICAN DEBT TO THE PEOPLE OF CUBA

Cristián Castaño Contreras

Right at its beginning, the Cuban Revolution became a symbol of liberation which was looked up to by many Latin American governments and in particular, by Mexico. The Revolution was much admired especially by some people in the old Mexican regime. For Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, who would become the head of the Mexican political police and later would be in charge of domestic poli-

cies, Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba meant a personal success, since Gutiérrez Barrios had provided support to his movement.

From the 1960s, Cuba was a paradise on earth for the parties holding political and economic power in Mexico and the island also became a center for the illicit activities of revolutionary groups which intend-

ing to export Castro's communist regime to other countries. For years, Cuba spared no effort to intervene in the affairs of other countries, providing ideological and military training to dozens of political and guerrilla movements. Cuba has been eager to destabilise governments, provide investments for revolutionary movements by consolidating financial strategies, hold up banks and



Photo by Lobo

Wife of Pablo Pacheco Avila, political prisoner

organize kidnappings. These criminal activities became known as “revolutionary banditry.”

Considering the declarations of Jorge Masetti, Mexico in particular was a strategic field for leading a “revolutionary mission.” Jorge is a son of the famous Argentinian journalist and founder of the Prensa Latina news agency and spent several years carrying out acts of “revolutionary banditry” in Central and Southern America, Africa and Mexico.

Jorge Masetti, who now enjoys protection by French authorities, described how everything had worked and how Cuban Revolution had been exported. People were assassinated and kidnapped, banks and jewellery shops were held up, and there was a great deal of trafficking – weapons, ivory, diamonds and many other things were smuggled to provide money for subversive activities. These crimes also led to the disappearance of Jorge’s father in law, Tony de la Guardia, who had been entangled in the intricate case of General Arnaldo Ochoa and was shot dead as a scapegoat in order to conceal the smuggling and all the organized crime perpetrated in order to obtain money for the revolutionary movements that Cuba supported around the world and especially in Latin America.

According to countless testimonies of guerrilla ex-leaders, it was the American Department, the center for military and revolutionary training in Cuba, which backed dozens of movements of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua. Today they are back in the government and they are the chief ally of Castro’s administration now led by his brother Raúl. Moreover, the American Department also provided support to the Farabundo Martí

National Liberation Front in Salvador, to the FARC and ELN in Colombia, to the radical Montoneros in Argentina and to the leader of the Mexican EZLN Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente.

This is quite ironic. For almost five decades, the Cuban government has been explicitly rejecting the spirit of “interventionism” and “interference” whenever any country or political agent dared to pinpoint the constant violations of human rights on the island. Yet the regime itself, driven by “revolutionary cynicism,” has felt entitled to back movements and political groups of a similar philosophy, providing them with training and financial support so that they could establish their governments in other countries.

In the past, Mexico received thousands of exiles escaping authoritative regimes in other parts of the world, such as Franco’s dictatorship in Spain or Augusto Pinochet’s regime in Chile; nevertheless, the Mexican government not only did remain silent about the systematic, flagrant and outrageous violations of the very basic rights of any Cuban citizen daring to disagree with some official decision of Castro’s government, but it also gave Fidel Castro its moral and financial support which helped him do many “revolutionary deeds” in Latin America.

Considering this fact, and bearing in mind that the Cuban government has prepared its own succession plan so that “everything remains as it is” when Fidel disappears from the scene, we have to admit that democratic countries need to form a strong alliance and denounce all the wrong that has been happening on the island. This need is even more urgent if we consider the powerful bond between Cuban and Bolivian politicians, the

political and ideological training and the propaganda of the government of Hugo Chávez, who nowadays plays an important role in exporting the Cuban Revolution.

The international community must finally speak out. It cannot remain silent about everything that has been happening for almost 50 years – about the disappearances, the summary executions, the premeditated trials leading to inexplicable sentences, the fear and the terror embedded in the families which are the very heart of society and the absolute marginalization of religions and of their social and spiritual role. The fact that there is only one person to make decisions, and that this person has become untouchable and his decisions unquestionable leads to social disintegration and makes millions of people share a monolithic will. This is what tends to happen in all authoritative governments, and in dictatorships like Castro’s this trend is even more perceptible.

The international community has not yet paid off its debt to the Republic of Cuba. There is something we owe to the millions of Cuban people who now cannot speak. We owe them hope that the old regime, replete with flowers and death, will soon opt for freedom, democracy and respect of human dignity, which should be the first priority of all governments in the world.

Cristián Castaño Contreras is a Mexican politician and member of the National Action Party. On two occasions, he was elected a federal deputy and in 1998 he founded the International Promoter of Human Rights.

FIDEL'S PILGRIMS

Claudio Paolillo

Pilgrimages are almost as ancient as the history of human civilization. Since time immemorial, people have made long exhausting journeys in order to worship their favorite idols. These journeys have often been closely related to religious faith. The holy places where people tend to gather range from the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to the pitch of the Boca Juniors football club in Buenos Aires

When they came to power in 2005, members of the Uruguayan left-wing

government introduced a special procession in which important governmental leaders, including several ministers, act as the "faithful;" the "saint" they venerate is the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. They do not follow the route to the shrine of St. James; they take the route to the shrine of Fidel.

In January 2006, the minister for economic development Marina Arismendi set out on the pilgrimage to Havana and came back dazzled by

the "fantastic" education and health programs she had seen in situ. "We want to build on the Cuban experience with literacy campaigns as well as with the medication and vaccination programs," she declared during her stay in Havana. The ex-secretary general of the Communist Party of Uruguay also had a talk with the Cuban foreign minister Felipe Pérez Roque and confessed what the journey actually meant to her. When she arrived, she said to Cuban press that it was a "dream."



Photo by Lobo

Juan González Leiva, Cuban lawyer and human rights defender

The pilgrimage to Castro's "sanctuary" continued in early April of the same year with the journey taken by the health minister María Julia Muñoz. She was more fortunate than her colleague, because she could speak with the "saint" himself. "I was amazed at the knowledge that Fidel Castro has about the field of public health," she said to the Cuban press agency Prensa Latina. Moreover, she added that the "Cuban scientific pole" was a "reference point for the rest of the world" and, like Marina Arismendi, she said that she was impressed by the "fantastic" Cuban health policies. "Your experience is very important for the transformation of health care system in Uruguay," María Julia Muñoz declared. The Uruguayan health minister did not spare any praise of the "revolutionary" energy saving plan. "It would be nice if other countries, too, had such a power saving plan, but not all the countries are lead by a man like Fidel Castro," she said.

I am hearing many of you saying "well, if this energy saving plan is so good, so 'fantastic,' how can it be that the government, in which she plays a very important role, has not decided to implement it in Uruguay? In this area, the country suffers from serious limitations: is this because Uruguay is a country without a leader like Fidel Castro?"

"The route to Fidel's shrine" was followed by another official mission. This time, the delegation was led by the minister of agriculture José Mujica and by the deputy foreign minister Belela Herrera. Among the delegation was Mujica's wife, the pro-government senator Lucía Topolansky. "Fidel is an old man and me too, so we would like to meet and have a talk," said Mujica before leaving Montevideo. Yet the deputy foreign minister, like her both female colleagues, could not avoid showing her enormous satisfaction with the talk

she had had with Pérez Roque, the foreign minister of the Cuban dictatorship. The Cuban "sanctuary" simply seems to exert a special fascination, mainly for the female pilgrims of the current government. According to AFP, after her meeting with Pérez Roque, Herrera said everything was "fantastic, wonderful and marvelous."

Captivated by a deep devotion which makes them set out for this "holy place," the current leaders of Uruguay who have taken the route to the shrine of Fidel seem to arrive in Havana and find everything a pilgrim longs for before even beginning the journey. They find their idol in the land of his power; they meet him in his place, in a special room for important conversations.

However, the Uruguayan "pilgrims" of the route to Havana, who find everything in Cuba "fantastic," "wonderful" or "marvelous," are not just "believers" whose creed has no significant impact on the lives of their fellow citizens. They are important members of a government and one should therefore expect them to act more deliberately or, at least, to be more moderate.

THE SANCTUARY AND ITS TRUE FACE

A small piece of recent information might help the Uruguayan politicians overcome the sentimentalism which takes hold of them the moment they arrive in Cuba and start a conversation with a man who has been leading a dictatorship for forty-eight years, the longest dictatorship in modern American history.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is an organization working on the American continent. The IACHR is the very same organization that, during the 1970s and 1980s, repeatedly condemned violations of human rights committed

by military dictatorships in various countries of Latin America. The left-wing ministers of Uruguay know this, and if they do not, they should know. What does the last annual report of the IACHR say about human rights in Cuba today?

We can now have a look at some paragraphs of the document. Perhaps they could sweep the mind of the devout Uruguayan ministers and remove the cobwebs that may be obstructing their reasoning:

1) Since 1959, there have been no periodic, free and just elections in Cuba based on universal secret suffrage as the sovereign expression of the people. According to the precepts of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, Cuban people are being denied the right to political participation.

2.) There are political prisoners in Cuba. Those who denounce or refuse to comply with prison rules are punished with extended periods of solitary confinement, have visits by their family and friends restricted and are denied medical care. Many of them are mistreated by prison guards, even in front of their families. Did the former Uruguayan political prisoner Mujica tell the dictator Fidel Castro about this little problem? He knows what solitary confinement, restricted visits, mistreatment and denial of medical care mean.

3) In Cuba, the families of those condemned for political reasons – which is to say for not agreeing with Castro's dictatorship – are usually victimized and harassed. Amnesty International reported that in some cases, such as the case of nine political prisoners of the Kilo 7 prison in the Camagüey province, the prison guard threatened to call off family visits unless the captives stop doing certain things, for example, reading the Bible. Women who are con-

sidered dissidents or opponents of the government suffer from repression and violations of their human rights. Some of them are threatened with prison; some are persecuted, detained or dismissed from work. Their families may also be threatened and persecuted.

4) Unions are not free, and workers who do not agree with the regime and try to set up unauthorized unions are systematically persecuted by the political police or are directly imprisoned for counter-revolutionary activities. The IACHR describes dozens of workers who were dismissed for political reasons, for signing declarations, for promoting the defense of human rights, for providing information to independent press and for being members of political opposition groups. There is only one central union recognized by the government on the island, and there can be no other. According to the IACHR, all of these attacks on the unions' activities are an infringement of human rights.

5) The Cuban State does not recognize the right of its citizens to leave their country and come back when they consider it appropriate. According to the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, everybody has the right to move freely within their country and not to leave the country but not out of their free will. When they want to travel abroad, Cuban citizens must have permission from the Ministry of Interior, while Cuban migration authorities continue to deny visas for political reasons to anybody who wishes to leave or enter, indefinitely postponing the review of their applications. The IACHR claims that the Cuban state restricts the right of abode and the right of free movement; those who are most affected by this are individuals that disagree with the current form of government.

6) The IACHR says that Cuba is the only country on the American con-

tinental where there is truly no freedom of expression. Those who wish to express their opinions freely are met with repression and censorship; journalists have to confront censorship before publishing their articles, they suffer from acts of repudiation and those who are imprisoned are subject to mistreatment. There are indirect violations of the freedom of expression, arrests, threats, search warrants and reporters may be condemned to two to seven years in jail for disrespecting the president of Cuba.

7) In Cuba, the Internet may not be accessed by ordinary telephone network. A web connection can only be used by those who have been granted permission by an entitled functionary of the central administration.

8) The IACHR claims that there is no division of public power which would guarantee a just administration free of interference from the other powers. The fact that courts are subordinate to the Council of State, led by Fidel Castro, means that judicial power depends directly on executive power; for this reason Cuban courts do not effectively provide for the rights of the accused, especially if they are being tried for political reasons. Instead of judicial procedures which would obey international calls for the respect of human rights, judges in Cuba try the accused according to ideological and political criteria, and therefore, not every individual is guaranteed the very basic right to a proper trial.

If some of the "faithful" of Castro's sect still think that the IACHR is an instrument of imperialism, it should be noted that in this very document, the IACHR speaks against the commercial embargo imposed by the United States decades ago and claims that its adverse effects are an obstacle for a transition from the

current dictatorship towards a democratic form of government.

In summary, for 47 years, Cuba has been governed by a dictator. There have been no elections in which people could elect their government. People are imprisoned for political reasons and their families are persecuted. There is no freedom of unions. People cannot travel outside the island and come back when they want. Freedom of expression does not exist, and no one can connect to the Internet without a prior permission by the government. Justice is but a parody directed by Castro.

FORGOTTEN PAST

It is astonishing that the current leaders of Uruguay, some of them persecuted in the past by a dictatorship in their own country, could seriously believe that all these facts described by the IACHR are "fantastic," "wonderful" or "marvelous." If they say so only to remain on good terms with their "dictatorial friend" and to receive the blessing of the holy "Father" of the Latin American left-wing parties, we are faced with an astounding frivolousness. And if they are really convinced that the tyranny is "wonderful," they are repeating the lie which says that the IACHR, the UN and all organizations and individuals defending and promoting liberty and human rights in Cuba are "right wing, neo-liberal, fascist dwarfs, lackeys of imperialism" and all the nonsense that Castro and his people promote in order to avoid any serious analysis of the present situation and, as usual, to turn the whole issue to their own advantage. The Cuban dictatorship is not "wonderful;" it is rubbish, like all dictatorships. Sooner or later, even the "pilgrims" will have to admit this.

Claudio Paolillo is the editor in chief of Semanario Búsqueda, a weekly magazine published in Uruguay, and regional director of the Interamerican Press Society (SIP).

CUBA AND LATIN AMERICA: A CUBAN VIEW

Lucas Garve

You could think that Cuba is united with Latin America by many means. But if you part from this point, it is almost certain that such exact analysis will fail. And you will also fail if you think that the last wave of democratization in Latin America could have an impact on the situation in Cuba in the sense of a possible transition.

Right now, however it seems exaggerated, the Cuban opposition is separated from the vast Latin American con-

continent by much more than just the West Indies Sea. First of all, there is no tradition of frequent or enthusiastic contacts. The elites of Latin America never showed interest in the tragic destiny of Cuban communism. In fact, it suited their purposes.

If we want to start in the beginning to get an explanation what has happened, we have to look beyond Fidel Castro and his troops' first assumption of power. From this moment, Latin America

started to live the dream of many generations of Latin-American intellectuals and politicians, who from the 1890 or so wanted to respond to US politics from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Cuba had served as a test of the systematization of aggressive North American politics in Latin America and, as a bonus, gained the opportunity to turn into a field of technological experiments of everything that



Photo by Lobo

Havana

could be useful for the development of a consumer society, an accelerator of the process of globalization that had started on the very same beaches in 1492.

Thus for the last almost 50 years, Havana has turned from being the Paris of the West Indies to a rubbish dump where all the embers and bad tempered folks of the bad habits of the anti-imperialism of Creoles, Africans, Indians, Mestizos and other mixed races arrived. For its part, the birth of the opposition to the Cuban communist regime had a much better midwife in the State Department than certain sectors of Cuban nation that desired to detour the splendid Revolution from what its communist path would become.

With the support of exiles 90 miles from Havana, the Cuban opposition survived thanks to the help of the lungs that blow in a constant material aid and solidarity, both from private and public funds from Miami.

In 1962, the Cuban government was expelled from the OAS and still remains in the same situation. Based on this fact, most Latin American governments, with the exception of Mexico, broke their relationship with Havana. It was only in the last five years of the 20th century when the Cuban politics focused on relations with Latin America. And slowly, Latin American governments have started to reopen their embassies in the Cuban capital. They have been spurred on by the consequences of more than a decade of military right-wing dictatorships and human rights violations and by the wishes be independent from the United States, which did not look completely appealing in the post-Berlin Wall world.

This a paradox; you might ask how governments that emerged from over-

throwing military dictatorships or from a transfer of power not strongly support democracy in Cuba?

The OAS, being a multilateral political organization with the longest experience in the world, joins together 34 member states living in democracy. Why was it not able to establish a mechanism of a dialogue with the Cuban opposition, or, at least, amongst its own members?

We have to look for the answer close to the image of Cuba as a place resistant to the pressures and efforts of many successive US officials, which have tried to take communism out of the island. And for a Latin-American mentality, this very sold image means accepting responsibility for its own failures. And it is still a consolation.

Latin American embassies in Havana do not keep close links with the Cuban opposition. With the exception of Costa Rica, which has a representation with a rank lower than an embassy, the others do not exchange courtesy greetings in receptions and seldom and disgustedly receive the opponents in their headquarters.

This fatal lack of communication does not feed the natural links that could possibly exist between the Cuban opponents and the organizations that defend the human rights in Latin American countries. Besides, in Latin America, I dare to say that most of the human rights organizations maintain a left-wing attitude or, at least, sympathize with it.

Various leaders of the Cuban opposition, like Marta Beatriz Roque or Félix Bonne Carcassés, reported that they do not to have any close relations with officials or diplomats from Latin America, unlike their relationship that exists with their European or US counterparts.

This lack of communication works against the rapprochement of the Latin-American sectors that do not cooperate with the most radical left-wing projects on the recent development of Latin America. A communication project among the opposition, Latin American human rights organizations and European counterparts would have to pass through the vertexes possibly established by aforementioned.

The present influence of Cuba's exterior politics on Latin America would complicate the transcendence of a project that would establish networks among Cubans and Latin American organizations which could develop survival in their own communities. Changes in the power towards the left wing, which we can see in some Latin American governments, allowed some tendencies, administrated by emerging elites who are privileged by a stream of minority groups that take the advantage of the exhaustion of the government structures instead of updated solutions, to mobilize a demanding message of a populist tone through communication channels at levels of ethnically homogeneous communities. Actions like the re-establishment of the sandinismo in the Nicaraguan government, a neighbor to Costa Rica, reflects the game played by the Cuban government to neutralize most internal opposition and Latin American organizations and governments.

Lucas Garve is a independent journalist living in Cuba. He is a member of Foundation for Free Expression.

IS MEDICAL AID THE REVOLUTION'S NEW EXPORT?

David I. Rabinowitz

According to a 2006 UN report, nearly 10% of the population of the Latin American and Caribbean region lives on less than a dollar a day, and even more manage to survive without sufficient food. The region relies a great deal on foreign aid for help, though the international community's efforts as a whole have not yet been enough to address all issues. The Cuban surge in exporting aid has spurred an ongoing controversy; it remains unclear if its target is to meaningfully help poor citizens or merely improve its image in the West.

Official development assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean exceeded US 5.2 billion US dollars in 2002, the most recent year for which figures are available from the OECD. Though significant and, in fact, increasing development assistance, both financial and in-kind, is from regional sources, foreign aid also comes from Western sources, both governmental and non-governmental. According to the United States Agency for International Development, the European Commission, the International Development Association and the Inter-American Development Bank have been the largest multilateral donors in the region. The United States, which contributed US 1.2 billion US dollars in 2002, has been the most significant bilateral donor. Japan, Spain, Germany, the Nether-

lands and the United Kingdom have also been active donors. The majority of this assistance has gone towards efforts regarding health, education, water, housing and employment.

CASE STUDY: BOLIVIA

Whereas Cuban medical aid from to Venezuela is most likely provided in exchange for cheap oil, financial loans and other help, Bolivia seems to be altogether a different case. The UNDP's

The Cuban surge in exporting aid has spurred an ongoing controversy; it remains unclear if its target is to meaningfully help poor citizens or merely improve its image in the West.

2006 Human Development Report ranks Bolivia 115th on its list of 177 countries. Sixty-three percent of the population falls under the national poverty line. Per capita, 176 US dollars is spent on health expenditures; there are 122 physicians per 100,000

people. In the Czech Republic, by comparison, per capita health expenditure is 1302 US dollars, and there are, percentage wise, almost three times as many doctors.

In Bolivia, medical aid has been amongst the most visible portion of foreign assistance programs that also include well-funded anti-narcotics trafficking efforts and infrastructure development projects. Help comes not only from regional sources, such as Venezuela and Cuba, but from world governments and non-governmental organizations as well.

To serve as a comparison, consider one such organization active in Bolivia and representative of non-governmental organizations working in the region. A 25 year old medical non-profit Operation Smile, headquartered in the United States, has a simple purpose: to give access to life changing reconstructive plastic surgery to children born with cleft lips and palates. Since 1999, more than 1000 children have been helped by international and local missions based in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. In practice, it is clearly different than the Cuban projects; Operation Smile's teams are composed of experienced surgeons, who voluntarily dedicate their time to the project and thus spread the good practices of their home country. While the surface

results of Operation Smile's efforts are easy to recognize, perhaps the more beneficial and more lasting aid they give revolves around the commitment to high quality medical standards, both in terms of equipment and personnel, and education programs. Not all such aid comes with such professionalism, character and altruism.

Cuba's approach to medical aid in Bolivia operates on two fronts. Castro has both built hospitals and sent his own doctors to work. As reported by Cuba's official newspaper, 23 level II hospitals were donated to the Bolivian regions of Santa Cruz, Oruro, La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosi and Beni in March of this year. The policy of exporting doctors has been longstanding, widespread and controversial.

This so-called medical diplomacy originated with a team of doctors visiting Chile after it suffered an earthquake in 1960. At the end of 2005, Cuban doctors were operating in 68 countries around the world, and more than two dozen in Latin America, including Argentina,

Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela and St. Kitts and Nevis. The Cuban government even offered to send a team to the United States after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Considering the successes others have had and the lasting impact made by many governments and organizations operating in Bolivia, the Cuban method begins to appear flawed and even ineffective. Cuba's health care system has been a long standing source of pride for the Castro regime. Yet the accuracy of their claims of superior coverage and care is more than questionable; in practice, the quality of treatment available to most Cubans is sub-standard and poor. Hospital facilities have been described as filthy and un-fit for humans. Medicine is often in short supply. With these realities, it seems counter-intuitive and wrong-headed for the government to export medical aid. The country sends supplies abroad that are needed at home; doctors who could be practicing in the rural areas of the island end up working, in some cases against their will, around the world.

In addition to this issue of expediency, the dubious standard of Cuban doctors who are sent abroad raises serious concerns. Credible claims of poor training and a lack of qualification abound. Regional doctors, from countries such as Venezuela, Colombia and Bolivia, familiar with Cuba's program have reported that people with limited educations are often falsely presented as credentialed physicians. This sheer dismissal of Hippocrates and the threat passed on to patients is horrid. Doctors around the region and around the world are well aware of the inferior care exported by Castro; indeed, their opinion of the regime has been even worsened by the practice. For a program intended to win over world public opinion, this unanticipated side effect seems crushing.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS?

In comparison with other similar projects, the Cuban approach to medical aid appears to be motivated by a desire to extend pro-Castro propaganda. The history of international aid at



Photo by David I. Rabinowitz

International Volunteers Working in a Bolivian Operating Room

large has often had a political component; from missionaries to the Marshall Plan, governments and organizations alike have used aid to try and influence others. True, local people in Bolivia and other developing countries have been helped, but the sheer danger posed by inferior care, and the attached negative attention drawn to Cuba, exclude the country's medical aid programs from the realm of efficacious and generous help. In the long term then, while sick locals receive care, the public's perception of Cuba still strives to be healed.

Using aid, medical or otherwise, as a diplomatic tool to win support amongst nations rarely works. When in need, people accept the help they need regardless of the source. Castro might gain some support here and there, but such quick won concessions ultimately fail. The other side effects are gaining more admirers in the rich countries as well as a healthy competition in who gives more to the poor. Medical aid to Bolivia and development assistance to Latin America is much needed, and a range of sources are working to provide it. Cuba's attempts to help have been

tarnished by an overall ulterior attitude, and in practice, has been questionable and, at times, harmful. Especially when compared to Western aid, both governmental and non-governmental, the differences that emerge in how such programs are carried out further harm the image of Cuban medical aid.

David I. Rabinowitz is an intern at People in Need. He joined the Operation Smile Santa Cruz, Bolivia mission in March 2007 as a volunteer medical photographer.

ICDC ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

THE VIRTUAL EMBASSY: AN EFFORT TO ENGAGE LATIN AMERICA IN CUBAN DEMOCRACY

Hernán Alberro

The transition to democracy in Cuba has already started; experts and politicians who have played an important role in the transition of Eastern Europe agree. However Latin America does not seem to notice this, and even if it does, it obviously does not support the process.

The objective of the two virtual embassies that have already been founded in Latin America by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) has been to remedy this by committing Latin America to get more involved in the democracy in Cuba, making political leaders aware of the

situation and providing information about what really happens on the island. This article addresses the current state of affairs and describes the relationship between Cuba and Latin America. It considers the activities of both virtual embassies and evaluates their effectiveness.

AN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

In her article about the relationship between Cuba and Latin America, published in the book "Cuba Today and Tomorrow," Ana Covarrubias Velasco claims that, for various reasons, governments in the region do not place

Cuba in the center of their attention, as they might have done in the past. If Latin America could exist with an incompatible Cuba by its side for so many years, it can very well continue its relationship with the island on the same terms for many years to come. Therefore, Ana Covarrubias Velasco comes to the conclusion that the inter-American system does not seem to be a proper and efficient mechanism in promoting change in Cuba.

Why then should one be concerned about the relationship between Latin America and the island in the Caribbean? Simply for the reason that if we

want the transition to continue, to be peaceful and to end without bloodshed, the role played by the countries in the region will be of key importance. This was the experience of the countries in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

There is another important reason why it is necessary that Latin America be concerned about what happens in Cuba. Many countries in the region were once victims and they should not forget about the ones which are now victims. By forgetting the victims of today, Latin America will be forgetting those of her own past. If neighbors look the other way, take no notice of the violations of human rights and are not concerned about democracy in Cuba, can we really say that Latin America has overcome the times of the "big stick?" We must spare no efforts in making the countries of the region become engaged with the situation in Cuba.

Professor Fernando Ruiz believes that by being reluctant to challenge Castro, many democratic countries actually strengthen the dictatorship and allow the unpunished repression of dissidents to continue. Ultimately, these dissidents pay the human cost of international indifference. There is more to this issue: by not speaking out against Castro, democratic countries help create the sensation of impunity which may in turn seduce leaders in the region, who are currently democratic, to cross the frontier that separates them from being dictators.

A MESSAGE FROM EUROPEAN LEADERS

The virtual embassies of the ICDC are an experiment aimed at combating the lack of interest, information and concern in the countries of Latin America. When asked "Why Cuba?" the

virtual ambassadors – Markus Meckel, Arnold Vaatz (German MPs), Jan Ruml (former Czech MP), Philip Dimitrov (former prime minister of Bulgaria), Wojciech Bonowicz (Polish journalist), Rexhep Meidani (former president of Albania) and Laszlo Nagy (Hungarian member of the European Parliament) would answer the following:

Latin America and Cuba share a language, a continent and history. They also share their experience with a dictatorship. Who else should play the key role in the democratization of Cuba, if not Latin America?

The transition to democracy can be supported in many different ways and all are helpful and much appreciated. You have to show the dissidents that they are not alone and you can do this by signing charters, sending fax messages, making phone calls, discussing the issue at political meetings, or directly asking Castro and his government to change the repressive policies.

You should spare no effort in conveying your position to Cuban authorities. They have to know that Latin America is concerned about what happens on the island and that the Southern American countries know about the persecution of peaceful dissidents and that in the region, such actions will not be tolerated.

You can create special institutions and organizations that would include Cuba, providing that there was first a definitive change towards democracy on the island.

One may think that these answers can be given by anybody, but this is not true. In Latin America, especially in the countries in the southern part of the continent, Europe is considered to be the ideal example; in Europe, politicians are respected and even admired.

With that in mind, the ICDC, People in Need and the Centre for Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL) invited a number of political figures from several different countries to convey their experience with transition to their Latin American counterparts. Their visits were of great importance and were much appreciated. Moreover, these people gave voice to those who are not allowed to speak in Cuba.

While seeking solidarity of Latin America with Cuban democrats, I have learned two things: 1) The most touching story, the one which changes opinions and makes people aware of certain facts, is a first person narrative. 2) The best way to arrange a meeting with an important person is to ask another important person for help.

The virtual embassy of the ICDC practices both of these. Its members are distinguished figures who, in their respective countries, have played a leading role in a peaceful transition to democracy.

To increase awareness, the virtual ambassadors have been holding meetings with different political figures in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile. They have been having debates with vice presidents, lawmakers, councilors, members of the opposition and even with the leaders of left-wing parties which once had a close relationship with Fidel Castro. All these politicians were given information about the current state of affairs in Cuba, about political prisoners and their families and also about dissidents who continue in their work despite the fact that the regime restricts their freedom in every possible way. Moreover, the ambassadors of the ICDC shared their experiences regarding how political leaders in other coun-

tries had supported dissidents, and spoke about how to help the victims of Castro's dictatorship.

This exchange of experiences, suffering and hope raises awareness of the issue, wins Cuban democrats more support and boosts the commitment of those who have already offered their help in various ways.

The virtual embassies are certainly not perfect and, of course, they are not the only means of seeking stronger support for democracy. Their campaigns have been hindered by the lack of resources and time, and therefore, their impact has been, in some ways, limited. Nevertheless and in spite of these obstacles, the results are more than positive.

Just after a visit by the ambassadors to Brazil, President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva and his government spoke up in favor of the transition in Cuba. We may be hasty in attributing their declarations to the delegations by

the ICDC, but we are exaggerating when we say that the virtual embassies have done their piece. Without these efforts, the president of the largest country in Latin America might not have made such a declaration.

THE "SURPRISE FACTOR" IN LATIN AMERICA

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Ana Covarrubias Velasco claims that during the course of history, the relationship between Cuba and countries like Uruguay, Salvador, Argentina, Costa Rica, Panama and Mexico has deteriorated several times. Thanks to political changes in the region, however, Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil are currently amongst the least hostile countries. Sudden and unpredictable changes are a part of Latin American tradition and the attitude of Latin American countries towards Cuba in no exception.

Over the past ten years, Argentina changed its position several times.

The country voted against Cuba in the Commission for Human Rights of the UN despite the fact that the Peronist President Carlos Menem "secretly" remained on good terms with Castro. When Fernando de la Rúa came to power, all diplomatic relations between the two countries were discontinued. With the election of Néstor Kirchner, relations between Argentina and Cuba were excellent and Castro was even granted an honorary citizenship of Buenos Aires. Today, president Kirchner is still in power, but, relations with Castro's government are going through a somewhat difficult time due to Castro's apathy and rigidity in the case of Hilda Molina, a Cuban lady who wishes to go to Argentina to meet her grandchildren.

Argentina is only one example of a Latin American tradition whose reflection can be seen in the majority of the countries. The "surprise factor" is one characteristic of Latin America; policies towards Cuba are not designed in terms of strategy and foreign policy,



Photo by Hernán Albero

ICDC delegation (Meizani, Nagy and Kritz) meeting with Rio de Janeiro's Deputy Prefect Octavio Leite (PSDB), Gilberto Braga and Prof. Augusto Cottoni

but they are implemented according to surveys and changes in domestic affairs. Therefore, an act that may seem unimportant and normal in the domestic affairs of a democratic country can trigger an overnight change in foreign policy towards Cuba.

The virtual ambassadors saw this during their visits to our countries, and still they did not become discouraged and did not lose the motivation for further work. On the contrary: they

know that changes in attitude are inherent to Latin America and that they will not be suppressed forever. If today the countries are indifferent to what happens in Cuba, tomorrow there may be enormous interest, bitter criticism and calls for democracy. The current Latin America posture on Cuba is as frail as the dictatorship itself and both will fall when least expected. We must be prepared, and in this, the virtual embassies of the ICDC play an extremely important role.

Hernán Alberro is Program Officer at the Center for Opening and Development of Latin America (www.cadal.org).

ICDC ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

FIVE EUROPEANS SHAKING CASTRO'S LEGEND

Jan Ruml

There are five of us and before this, we had hardly known each other. Yet a series of mutual telephone calls from the Prague offices of the People in Need brought us so close together, that on one winter gloomy day, we all met at the Paris Orly airport at the gate leaving for Argentina. It is a varied group: East-German Social Democrat Markus Meckel, the former Prime Minister of Bulgaria Philip Dimitrov, a Polish publisher, a Chilean journalist and I – a retired Czech politician. We are about to begin a journey to three Latin American countries, where we hope to arouse compassion among the representatives of these countries for the people of Cuba, especially the persecuted women of the political prison-

ers there. All of us have lived through dictatorships, and all of us, in some way contributed to its fall and the to the first steps of its new freedom. We all know how important any type of help from the outside was for us – and this is exactly what we want to speak about in South America. Yet when we find ourselves in Buenos Aires in a few hours, we cannot stop asking ourselves the persistent question of whether we are not there uselessly. It would turn out that this was not the case.

AS SOON AS HE DIES

The countries of Latin America have a romantic relationship with Cuba: for them, it is the David that resist-

ed the Goliath of Washington. Therefore, an individual expressing concern about the trampling of human rights on the "Island of Freedom" risks being labeled as a stooge of President Bush. Moreover, all of the countries in South America have their own problems; this is especially visible in Argentina, wherever you go. The atmosphere has a feverish haste to it, as if the people of Argentina want to run away from the results of the financial bankruptcy of the country at the end of the century. Here 40% of the people live under the poverty line; from their point-of-view freedom only serves the rich and powerful. The extensive slums on the outskirts of Buenos Aires obviously tear at the heartstrings, yet in gen-

eral the worst part of the crisis is behind them: the number of personal automobiles, the abundantly stocked shops and restaurants with local beef and wine from Mendoza leave no one in doubt that stability, if not yet prosperity, has returned. Our mission begins in Parliament, at a meeting with government and opposition politicians. Argentineans are very self-confident and do not like when some one tells them how to behave. Therefore, the embargo against Cuba by the United States and the European Union sanctions are seen by them as proof of arrogance. A Member of Parliament, a professor of Constitutional Law, almost stabs himself with his own fork as he tries to explain during lunch about both the evils of the embargo and that the health-care system in Cuba belongs among the best in the world. "Castro is doing a magnificent job," declares the energetic man. "Yes, it is a mistake that he imprisons his political opponents and that he does not allow free elections – which is by the way unnecessary, because he would obviously win." The five of us have our own opinions about this. Nevertheless, the embargo soon appears to be a touchy subject, even for us. The former Prime-Minister of Bulgaria Philip Dimitrov and I defend it as a principled position, the Social Democrat Meckel is against it. We agree that it is an ideological issue which we must not allow to divide us.

At the city council in Buenos Aires we are greeted in the offices of the Vice-Mayor by a tall slender man with sharp features, a representative of the Justicialist Party and a lover of Prague. He sums up the reasons why it is important to have a balanced position towards the situation in Cuba. Because we hear the same argument from many sources, it can be summarized in general in the following manner. At the beginning the speaker assures us that he is a Democrat and

obviously does not agree with the violation of human and civil rights anywhere in the world. However, then follows the reminder that one should not interfere into the affairs of a sovereign state and that in the end all the problems in Cuba stem from the American embargo. If it were not for this "act of aggression," everything would have developed differently. Despite whatever problems they may have, Cuba has achieved a certain level of security for the society of which other people in Latin America can only dream of. For this Fidel deserves respect, even if it is possible that in many of his characteristics, he is a "problematic figure." And really, it doesn't really matter because until Castro dies, nothing can be done. We feel this sense of fatalism throughout our journey wherever we go.

MARADONA AT MAR DEL PLATA

We are greeted harshly in the second largest city in Argentina Mar del Plata – it is here that the meeting of the Organization of the American States is now taking place. We hope to hand over our joint declaration to the participants of this conference from our "Virtual Cuban Embassy" and several lawmakers from Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile have signed on to an appeal to the Latin America governments to stand up for the release of the political prisoners in Cuba and to open up their embassies to the Cuban dissidents. Our messengers Meckel and Dimitrov are stopped by the police blockades. As an unwanted coincidence, just a few steps from the inconspicuous activities of our delegation, a "protest meeting" is being held at the local football stadium by Castro admirer and ideological successor, Venezuelan President Chávez, who has invited two other famous admirers of Fidel – Argentinean football idol Maradona and a bard who supports the regime in Cuba, Rodriguez. Shortly after their show ends,

a battle between the police and the opponents of the visiting George Bush erupts.

Despite the turbulent atmosphere, we are able to organize a debate with young lawyers of the local university and in the Cathedral we meet with several dozen Catholic priests who travel to Cuba and provide their colleagues there with a great amount of moral support. A member of our group, Wojciech Bonowicz, speaks the most and his story of the martyr's death of Jerzy Popieluszko, a priest murdered during the period of Solidarity by the Polish Secret Police, is met with a good response. We receive a similar heartfelt welcome at the Archbishops in Montevideo in neighboring Uruguay.

ROCKETS FOR SALVATOR

Although Uruguay has turned to the left through the last few elections, and its President belongs among Fidel's supporters, paradoxically it is here where we are received at the highest possible level: we speak with the Vice-President and the Chairman of the Senate, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and former President Lacalle, a member of the Committee for Democracy in Cuba. Here we can see the decency towards foreigners from indistinguishable countries that are associated with the name of Václav Havel. This truly opens doors for us here. After flying to Chile, we speak for a long time with ex-President Aylwin about the mythical Castro, who is seen in Latin America more as a hero than as a dictator. According to him, in the future no politician will reach the level of importance of being considered a living legend. They will possibly be rich or a persuasive speaker such as Chávez or a descendant of the oldest Indian tribe such as the new Bolivian President Morales, promising to confiscate private property, yet

there will still never again be such a hero. Castro, in the eyes of South Americans, defeated the great America. No one in the future will be able to do this.

The Chairman of the governing Chilean Social Democratic Party Ricardo Núñez belongs among the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship and spent years in political exile in former East-Germany and in Czechoslovakia. After the fall of the junta, he returned home and joined the supporters of reconciliation. He tells us that he is a personal friend of Castro, but criticizes him for the persecution of the opposition, and during his visits to Cuba he also meets with the dissidents and knows, in detail, the plans for democratic changes. These plans included the one offered by the most well known Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá, whose petition has been signed by tens of thousands of people. During another meeting in the Presidential palace, in the same place where the rockets fell during

the bombings of 1973, it occurs to me what will happen in Chile if the left again wins the elections.

In Santiago de Chile, an unappealing city in the middle of the mountains, we part with the cloudy smog from millions of cars. The pollution is so awful that a plane to blow up one of the mountains, which will allow for a more natural circulation of the air, has emerged. Across the beautifully visible, yet mysterious Andes, we return back to the beginning of our trip – to Buenos Aires.

We fly back home in stages. First Markus Meckel leaves so that he can vote for the Grand Coalition in Germany. Then Philip Dimitrov moves on to the meeting of the Madrid Club in Prague. Wojciech Bonowicz, the Chilean journalist Carlos Gonzalez and I seem to understand one other completely. Upon our return transfer in Paris, during which Gonzalez is almost arrested for his dark complexion, we wait absolutely exhausted for

our luggage. “So gentlemen, what do you think,” Carlos asked. “Was there any point to it at all? Was it worth it?” We sat in our chairs in silence and allowed all the events to run through our head. At least some politicians, former Presidents, journalists who have their hands tied by self-censorship and students know that someone is interested in what happens outside of their homes. This is nothing to set the world on fire, but those individuals who we spoke with cannot deny this. The response in the local media is proof of this. One of the prestigious newspapers in Buenos Aires asked me what I thought of the situation in Argentina. I answered that in Cuba people are imprisoned for their own ideas. If Castro had read this, it would have driven him up the wall.

Jan Ruml, former Czechoslovak dissident, served as a Senator and Minister of Interior.



ICDC delegation (Meidani, Vaatz, Nagy and Kritl) meeting with Uruguay National Representative Sandra Etcheberry
Photo by Hernán Albero

TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCE

**AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF
CENTRAL EUROPEAN REFORMS**

Leszek Balcerowicz

Speech at the Lech Walesa Institute conference in Warsaw, 2007

What I will discuss here is based on various studies carried out over the past few years on the process of transformation within a country, its economy and society, in Central and Eastern Europe, where for a long time the socialist model prevailed. I will not present my own preferences or opinions, but rather the results of various investigations, in which opinion must be grounded.

Firstly, what were the initial conditions? What did this socialist or communist regime represent? It presented three essential characteristics. The first was that all individual liberties were extremely limited. In this sense, it was tyranny. The most severely curbed liberties were economic, but the legal market was also prohibited, since the national companies found themselves subordinate to central planning. Foreign exchange was prohibited, which meant that if someone wanted to import from, or travel abroad, they had to ask for foreign currency from the government. At the same time, this had an impact beyond the economic sphere, in that if that person was out of favour with the government, they simply saw their request denied. There was no freedom to travel either. Communication means were monitored, both in terms of censorship of external

communication and self-censorship of local communication.

Thus, here is the first characteristic: extreme restriction of freedom. Nobody in the world has ever been able to grant prosperity when restricting freedoms to such a degree. In my view, the essence of Marxism consisted of recognising that the passing of power to the community, i.e. to the nation, would generate progress. The actual result, it is not hard to predict, was precisely the opposite.

The second characteristic in itself is somewhat more pleasant. Previously, there had been considerable social guarantees, and although it was understood that the situation would not be better, there was security in what existed. Unemployment was not discussed openly; it was hidden. Basic consumer goods were cheap, but you had to queue for them. Furthermore, you paid in other ways. Durable items were extremely expensive. There was no choice. Under socialism, companies also acted as social support structures.

And, thirdly, there was no State of Law to provide the basis for the nation. What does this mean? Activities essential for development were considered to be crimes in the eyes

of socialist law. Development required private initiative, but this was synonymous with delinquency. The existence of a political opposition, such as the presentation of alternative programs, was also considered illegal.

Furthermore, there was a series of huge costs that have nothing to do with the economic aspects; however, I will just briefly mention them here. Living in hypocrisy, which many today idealize, was not pleasant at all. There were enormous economic costs stemming from wasted time. All the socialist countries wasted inordinate amounts of time. There are no exceptions. Let us take the example of Cuba and Chile. In 1950 Cuba had 56% of Chile's per-capita income. In 2003 they had only 23%. That is to say half of what they had. Let's take Poland and Spain. In 1950, more or less the same, in 1992 Poland had only 42% of Spain's per capita income. Spain has developed much faster.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE**

I will now briefly look at the experiences of Central and Eastern Europe. Over a short period of time, the gaps widened considerably, both from an economic point of view and in other areas. If we consider with an index

of 100 the level of GNP in 1988 we will see that Poland achieved at that time its greatest relative growth, 47%, although it could have done better. Looking at Ukraine and Russia we see that their incomes are still under the levels at the fall of the Soviet regime.

Inflation is fairly unpleasant for people. It is like your health. When you are healthy you don't think about it, but when you get sick, you notice. All countries reduced their inflation levels considerably. Which countries had the most notoriously high inflation levels? Ukraine, Russia. That is to say countries whose economic results were considerably worse. This shows once again the absurdity of thinking that high inflation improves well being. It is completely the opposite.

Attracting foreign investment for building companies, start on the road of privatization or to acquire existing companies is a worthy objective. Direct foreign investment brings new knowledge in terms of technology and organization, which cannot be learned in manuals. For this reason, as we all know, any sensible government will work on attracting more foreign investment, including already rich countries such as the United States, France and Great Britain. Therefore, it is interesting that there have been huge differences in the amount of foreign investment per capita between 1989 and 2005.

According to this measure, which countries head the Central and Eastern Europe region? The Czech Republic and Estonia and then Hungary. Poland is more or less at the same level as Mexico, although the latter has a longer capitalist tradition. But look at the Ukraine or Russia, which have between ten to 20 times less capital than in the Czech Republic or

Estonia. I will take the opportunity to mention Cuba, where despite the huge differences, shows certain similarities with China, into which much foreign capital flows from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand, as well as from the USA, Germany and France. As I understand it, there are a million Cubans in exile with capital saved, something that Poland did not have. Not to the same degree. It is a very important advantage.

Frequently, you will hear it said that "slower growth is better for our well being." This is nonsense, as you will see. Countries with the highest growth have the best results in terms of health, equality in pension systems, and environmental protection.

In terms of health, we take into account a very important aspect. Infant mortality. In Poland it diminished from 19 to seven deaths per 1000 births. In other countries of Central and Eastern Europe progress has also be made. But in Russia we can note a drop from 23 to 17, a significantly less impressive improvement.

Is life expectancy increasing? This would be a good way of measuring quality of life. In Poland, Slovakia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe life expectancy has increased in only three years.

Income differences. Inevitably certain inequalities increase if the economy is freed from political tutelage. What inequalities are we talking about? If you allow a system of free enterprise, this will lead to higher incomes. During the socialist regime there was no point in education – from an economic point of view – as people with an education did not have higher salaries than those who did not. All of this changes in a country with a market economy. So there is no point in

complaining that inequality increases. Inequality is measured by the Gini index. In Poland it increased to 24, which is no more than in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is not true that in Poland inequality has increased to record levels; however, in those countries where less reforms were implemented, these figures increased notoriously: Russia and the Ukraine. For fewer reforms, more inequality, while there are fewer skills and greater fortunes linked to politicians. So, if you do not want inequalities to increase, or as I would say, you want "fairer inequalities," you also have to reform the country and the economy and not block this process.

Socialism was very destructive for the environment, as it was an expensive, wasteful system and consumed too much raw material and energy. What changed? Quite a lot, but to different degrees. A good measurement is how much PNB was generated per unit of energy used. The more that is produced from a single source, the better. In Poland this improved considerably, from 3 to 4.5, which puts us at the same level as South Korea. It is not bad. In other Central and Eastern European countries, improvements have also been made. However, in Russia, the situation is different in that they still have an economy that consumes enormous amounts of energy. The conclusion is the following: it is not possible to be a reasoned ecologist and be against a market economy.

An observation can be made, that countries with the worst starting points should experience slower growth, as their economies were in a worse state. It is true. For example, Lithuania, a country considerably smaller than Poland, depended more heavily on the Soviet Union. The cost of the fall of the USSR was high for Lithuania and its per-capita

income fell by 40%, while in Poland it only fell by a few percentage points. But the differences in initial conditions only work for short-term goals, while long-term objectives need other strengths. The greater the market reforms, the more we move away from socialism and the better the economic results are. Therefore Lithuania has gained on us in the past years because they reformed more rapidly.

And why do those countries that achieved the best economic results usually have the best results beyond the economic sphere? Here fewer studies have been done and we rely on a bit of popular wisdom. If a country is to develop economically, it must introduce the concept of skills and the market, if it introduces skills and the market, enterprise begins to flourish and the environment improves. Furthermore, it transforms from a lawless state to a State of Law, and legislation relating to ecology also begins to be applied, thus favoring the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

I will now present what seem to be the main conclusions, which in my view should be transmitted to other countries in comparable situations. I think that Cuba, with its socialist economy and central planning, is sufficiently similar to be considered one such country. Therefore, I will firstly refer to one of the extremely important conclusions. The more market reform, the better the economic results and non-economic results. Those that block the application of reform are affecting the people. They are hindering growth and contributing to the increase of unemployment but present themselves as benefactors. And it is precisely those who proclaim the greatest love for the people who cause the greatest harm. A statistic fact. We have here a level of transformation measured by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development based on eight partial indicators including both privatization and economic liberalization. The conclusion is that in countries where more reforms

are applied, the economic growth has been greatest. I have omitted here three countries, those for which it is statistically impossible to draw an example: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Belarus, three dictatorships with anti-market systems.

The best example is perhaps Armenia. A country with a very unfavorable geographic location, far from the sea, surrounded by hostile neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan. A country which, since 1999 has achieved phenomenal economic success. Growth of 10, 13, 14, 10 and 14%. In Poland we dream of managing 5%. Armenia did what practically no other country of Central and Eastern Europe did, with the exception of Lithuania, which was to reduce the government spending in the economy. The ratio between public spending and GNP fell from 30% to 17.7%, while in Poland it stands at 44%. This is called eurosclerosis. In Armenia it was necessary to reduce taxes to 14% of GNP, which is similar to the fiscal imposition of the Asian tigers. This was accompanied by a drop in inflation.



Photo by Lobo

Havana

LIBERALIZATION, RECONSTRUCTION, STABILITY

Reform of a market economy is based on three essential factors.

Firstly, liberalization. That is to say the elimination of political restrictions that put the brakes on any reform process. This means firstly eliminating the barriers that prevent the creation of private enterprises, one of the essential characteristics of socialism. Secondly, this is painful but indispensable, if energy is cheap because it is subsidized, it will always be unprofitable. And the environment will suffer. Frank interaction with the outside world is essential to develop international commerce and maintain an even local currency value.

Secondly, reconstruction of institutions. That is to say either the creation of new institutions that were unable to exist under socialism, or the reorganization of existing ones. For example, under the old socialist regime it was forbidden to have a stock exchange. And what needs to be reorganized? The business sector. Privatizing this sector means taking away the politicians' power over companies. And because politicians are necessarily bad, they are no better or worse than your average citizen. It is also necessary to reorganize public institutions such as the Courts and the Judicial Authority, and convert them into independent and competent bodies, dedicated to learning how to apply new legislation. Before, speculators were prosecuted, and now, private owners need to be protected. A completely different task.

And thirdly, it is important to ensure stability, such as in prices, that inflation is kept low, to prevent public debt growing to such levels that it presents a major threat and provokes a crisis.

It is worth reiterating, since people forget, that institutional reorganization, while it also needs to be done rapidly cannot be carried out as quickly as liberalization or stabilization. Here people need to learn new skills. It is a time-consuming process, however, this is no reason to wait 20 years to do it. What is needed is preparation, as that shock therapy of the initial phase is three to four years long.

INSEPARABLE REFORMS

In Poland, we managed to apply ini-

If there is liberalization, especially if it happens unexpectedly, there is initially a period of euphoria. This is extra time, a great gift from history. And this time should be put to good use by trying to apply competently the greatest number of reforms possible.

tially reform on a wide front, rather rapidly. Some times this process was erroneously referred to as shock therapy and people were unnecessarily afraid, as the word "shock" conjures up for many the image of an electric shock. It is better to speak quickly and in a wide spectrum. What are the arguments for such a strategy? It turns out that many elements are linked. For instance, if free prices are to exist, there must be the capacity to ensure that producers do not abuse

the situation. And for this capacity to exist there must be a liberalization process, enterprises must be created and there must be an opening up to the outside world. There are many such interdependencies. Economic reforms that are applied following socialism are difficult to separate out. Just like with some medicines, there is a minimum dose.

If there is liberalization, especially if it happens unexpectedly, there is initially a period of euphoria, followed by frustration. The groups from the previous system find themselves discredited and the opposition, if it exists, has not yet entered the confrontation phase. This situation can last for a year, a year and a half. This is extra time, a great gift from history. And this time should be put to good use by trying to apply competently the greatest number of reforms possible. Afterwards it will be much more complicated, and since it is impossible to do everything in this short period of time, as much must be done as can be managed.

The third argument is based on the psychology of society, specifically the theory of cognitive dissonance. It is known that when people do not like something but recognize the change as irreversible, they will come to accept it after time. Therefore, the more decisively that changes are made, the more strongly they will be accepted.

THREE PRIVATIZATION PROCESSES

The first has to do with openness to the possibility of creating new companies, which is very important for the people. Secondly, in the beginning there are state companies, which if they are not privatized will disappear. Therefore they must be privatized quickly. And finally, it is very

important when the country wishes to recover, that it protects itself from foreign capital. As I was mentioning earlier, it seems to me that Cuba has an advantage in that it has considerable capital outside the country. Studies show that under our conditions, companies with foreign capital increase profitability more quickly and as a result can pay better salaries.

BANKING SYSTEM

It should be recalled that in the beginning there are no real banks and no people who know the banking sector. Therefore there are two strategies. The first is not to postpone the privatization process so that banks do not disappear. Then, inevitably due to the lack of capital and know-how, there is a strong need for foreign capital. This happened everywhere: Poland 71%, Slovakia 97% and Lithuania 91%. Everywhere there is a large part of foreign capital in banks. And if privatization was put off, that means that state ownership dominated and there were weak private banks. This situation is above all the case in Russia, let alone Belarus. Thus it was necessary to choose between one model and the other. There is no third way that leads straight to the Swiss banking model. The starting conditions do not enable it.

Finally, it is very important to lead the country to monetary stability. Money in today's world is not worth its weight in gold, or in silver. It can be multiplied indefinitely and rapidly, affecting its value. In this regard, money must be stable and strictly controlled. This role falls to an independent central bank. It will probably receive money from another country, such as dollars. In this case, another central bank, an external one, will ensure that stabil-

ity is maintained. It is better not to have a deficit or accumulate public debt as this leads to the instability of economic administration.

WAIT FOR THE BEST TIME?

It is very important to remember that the conditions to apply reform do not ripen like fruit in the garden. This means that waiting does not always have an effect, the biological metaphor is misplaced. Each occasion must be seized. But to be able to do so, you must be prepared, with a program and a team of people ready to begin reform rapidly and to implement reforms in such a way that there can be no going back.

Also, the role of the communication media is crucial. During the communist regime the media was controlled and many people thought that all was well, that there was no poverty, no crime. When the media are freed, which is a good thing, they begin to focus on all the negative news of the new reality. The solution is not to maintain censorship, but that it is crucial to educate journalists in the spirit and ethics of professionalism

Even reform will give rise to dissatisfaction. It is true. Because if there were no dissatisfied people, reform would have been carried out a long time ago and there would have been no complications. The fact that economic reforms succeed, that is to say that they speed up development, enables us to compare how certain groups do badly and others progress. Let us take miners, for example. In Poland, under the old communist systems they were highly paid in comparison with other people who had much prestige. This was due to the fact that, among other things, socialism did not count the costs. What happened when the move was made to a market economy? The

comparative position of the miners lowered, although not in absolute terms. Librarians, engineers or business people gained. However, it must be understood that it will be difficult to find much support for reform among these groups. The comparative position between a librarian and an engineer improved. But they are so busy building their professional careers that they do not participate much in public life.

During socialism there were high levels of unemployment. This was hidden. When you switch to a market economy, the existence of unemployment is brought to light. From the individual's point of view it is better to be doing nothing in a job that looks fine from the outside. However, are these valid arguments not to reform? Of course not. Firstly because without reform a country can only fall into disarray. Secondly, if it falls into disarray everyone will be unsatisfied eventually. Everyone. And rightly so.

Leszek Balcerowicz is former Minister of Finance and President of the Central Bank of Poland. He is famous for implementing the Polish economic reforms.

DOCUMENT

SUPPORT TO UNITY FOR FREEDOM

European NGOs express their support of the Declaration of Unity of the Cuban Opposition and call for Europe to also stand united on Cuba

Berlin, 26 April 2007. On the occasion of the meeting organized by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) on "Democracy in Cuba: Seeking Common Initiatives," the undersigned European NGOs gathered in Berlin express their full support of the recent declaration of unity made by the Cuban democratic opposition.

On 14 April, the leaders of the opposition in Cuba, together with members of independent civil society, adopted the declaration "Unity for Freedom". Through this declaration the opposition proclaimed its union in seeking the establishment of democracy in Cuba. It also stated that its common goals would be the respect for human rights in Cuba, national reconciliation and social justice. These goals are to be achieved through peaceful and democratic means. The declaration also reiterates its request that political prisoners be unconditionally released without further delay.

This declaration confirms the de facto cooperation of the opposition over the past years. It is a clear signal that the different streams and movements of the Cuban democratic opposition are ready and willing to work together to establish democracy in the island.

The undersigned NGOs endorse this declaration of unity and hope and commend all individuals and groups involved in this initiative for their courage, vision and leadership.

The same leadership and courage is needed at a European level. A principled stance, whereby human rights and democratic values will prevail over national interests, is what the undersigned NGOs are requesting from European Union leaders. A stronger Common Position would allow for this and send a clear message to the Cuban opposition and Cuban people that Europe supports and endorses their struggle.

We call upon European leaders to put aside their differences, as poignantly done so by the Cuban opposition forces, and to take a common and principled stance to fully support the democratic forces in Cuba.

- » Maria Luisa Bascur, Cuba Futuro, Netherlands
- » Javier Martinez-Corbalan, Fundacion Hispano Cubana, Spain
- » Nikola Horejs, People in Need, Czech Republic
- » Katrin Wittig, International Society for Human Rights, Germany

- » Annabelle Rodriguez, Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana, Spain
- » Marianne Moor, IKV Pax Cristi, Netherlands
- » Natalia Bellusova, Iberoamerican Association for Liberty, Spain
- » Agnieszka Gratkiewicz, Lech Walesa Institute, Poland
- » Tomasz Pisula, Freedom and Democracy Foundation, Poland
- » Annika Rigo, Christian Democratic International Center, Sweden
- » Martin Pasiak, Pontis Foundation, Slovak Republic
- » Diana Ivanova, Cuba Libre, Bulgaria
- » Mae-Liz Orrego Rodríguez, Swedish International Liberal Centre, Sweden
- » Anna-Lee Stangl, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Belgium

- » Eliska Slavikova, People in Peril, Slovakia

DOCUMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S POLICY TOWARDS CUBA

Berlin, Germany, April 2007

This paper is comprised of recommendations for the mid-term strategy of the European Union towards Cuba. It was prepared by European NGOs that carry out projects in Cuba in support of independent civil society and is thus based on their research on the island and interviews with civil society representatives. The paper aims to contribute to the discussion on EU policy towards Cuba and enhance the dialogue on Cuban

policy between EU Member States, EU institutions, NGOs, and other relevant actors on the occasion of the upcoming reevaluation of the Common Position of the EU towards Cuba.

INTRODUCTION

In the last revision of the Common Position of 1996, the European Council confirmed the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Cuba

and decided to start working on a mid-term and long-term strategy. The presenters of this paper welcome this decision and believe that a reasonable strategy will enable the EU to assist Cuba in a peaceful transition towards democracy and a free society.

In its Common Position the EU pledges to facilitate peaceful change in Cuba and promote respect for human rights by intensifying the dialogue with the



Photo by Labo

Václav Havel speaking at the ICDC conference in Berlin

government and “all sectors of Cuban society.”¹ The process of reflection over the EU policy towards Cuba has not brought any visible results so far. Since the last revision of the Common Position in June 2006 there were attempts by the two presidency countries to propose new strategies with more concrete measures to be taken by the EU member states with the aim of supporting democratic forces in Cuba. However, not all EU member states are open to discussion over common EU policy because it interferes with their bilateral relations with Cuba and with their economic interests.

New developments on the island with the succession of power from Fidel Castro to his brother Raúl, show that the regime is ready to hold on to its power even after the demise of Fidel. This would most probably preserve the totalitarian regime, and for Cubans, a life without respect for their basic rights and freedoms. The European Union should, through its re-defined Common Position, send clear signals to the political, military and economic elites in Havana that it will not tolerate the continuance of this oppressive regime and it will not engage in cooperation until the Cuban regime makes significant changes towards democracy and rule of law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The European NGOs submitting this paper would like to offer their experience of working with Cuban independent civil society and monitoring the situation on the island, and thus suggest that the future EU strategy should be based on the following areas:

1. Measures towards the Cuban Government

The EU should

a) Maintain pressure regarding the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights

The Cuban government has not respected any demands for the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights set as conditions by the EU for further negotiations concerning EU-Cuba relations. The overall human rights situation has worsened over the past year as reported by many international organizations. Any further cooperation with future Cuban leaders must be only entered into with the pre-condition of the release of political prisoners.

b) Insist on a visit of Javier Solana’s Special Representatives for Human Rights.

This visit should be made with the goal of meeting the representatives of civil society, as well as raising human rights concerns with the Cuban government.

c) Demand that the new heads of the regime organize free and fair elections with the presence of international observers

As recent developments on the island show, the succession of power from Fidel Castro to his brother and Minister of Defense Raúl Castro is the scenario the regime is slowly pushing through. There is no doubt that this succession would preserve the totalitarian nature of the regime and oppression against the Cuban people who have had no possibility to decide if this is the fate they want for their country.

d) A targeted visa ban applied to Cuban officials directly responsible for human rights violations

Pressure on the government to respect human rights should be complemented by targeted measures. In particular, they should be considered with regard to top Cuban officials, for example judges and prosecutors involved in the trials of human rights activists and members of State security apparatus.

2. Support for Independent Civil Society in Cuba

The EU should

e) Support independent civil society by providing funding for their projects and organizations

Emerging civil society movements exist in Cuba that are able to partly evade the omnipresent state imposed control and survive its repressions. These movements are key to peaceful changes in Cuba. They cannot survive without support from the international democratic community.

f) Appoint an EU Special Envoy for Transition and Democracy

The EU should appoint a Special Envoy to Cuba who, with the help of an advisory body comprised of experts on Cuba and transition to democracy in communist and totalitarian regimes, would assess the key actors in transformation, design different alternatives for the strategy based on similar experiences in other regions and propose specific steps to be taken to implement this strategy.

g) Encourage the dissemination in Cuba of information on the experience of transition to democracy from EU member states

Many EU member states have gone through successful transitions from totalitarian regimes to democracy; they are willing to share their experiences with Cubans. There are numerous publications on European transitions to democracy that analyze the different aspects of transitions and compare the steps taken in each country. The EU should encourage the dissemination of such information through their missions.

h) Provide increased access for the free flow of information

Every mission in Cuba of an EU Member State should be encouraged to have computers with internet connection accessible for members of civil soci-

ety. A selection of European newspapers, magazines and recently published books should also be made available. At least some of these publications should be available in Spanish.

i) Take a more active role, through the European Commission (EC) Delegation in Havana, to further develop civil society

As the representative of the European Union, the EC Delegation should take a leading role in promoting human rights, including through the support of projects, and intensify its contacts with independent civil society. It should be actively involved in the above-mentioned recommendations e, g, and h.

j) Ensure the full implementation by all EU representations, including member state missions and the EC Delegation, of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders report that different member states' missions implement the guidelines to varying degrees. This has led to confusion among the human rights community in Cuba

about EU policy regarding human rights defenders, as well as to a decreased level of protection. The EU representation should take a proactive role in ensuring that Cuban human rights community is aware of the guidelines through dissemination and capacity building.

k) Emphasize Symbolic Elements of EU policy towards Cuba

The opposition and Cuban citizens should know that they are internationally supported and that they are not alone. New symbolic measures should be implemented by EU diplomats in Havana – for example, personal visits to the families that have been subjected to an act of repudiation and to the leaders of the independent civil society movements. They should also invite civil society representatives to all public events organized by EU Embassies.

3. Working in the International Arena

The EU should

l) Work towards a common approach on Cuba with other international actors

If European policy is to be effective, it is important to find common ground with other relevant international actors, such as the US, the UN and the countries of Latin America.

Despite apparent differences in their policies, there are already many shared elements. Common ground is a necessity for a peaceful transition and there are many similarities in the policies.

Prepared by

International Helsinki Federation

Christian Solidarity World Wide

Pontis Foundation

People in Need

Cuba Futuro

Asociacion Iberoamericana por la Libertad

International Society for Human Rights

Christian Democratic International Center

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

People in Peril Association

Fundacion Hispano Cubana

People in Peril



Photo by Labo

Conference of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, April 2007

NGO ACTIVITIES

A LANDMARK YEAR FOR CUBAN ACTIVITIES IN BULGARIA

Diana Ivanova

This year is a very special one for Cuban activities in Bulgaria. The Cuba Libre Days, organized by the Cuba Libre Civic Association for the third time, turned the attention of citizens and the media to the developments in present day Cuba and encouraged a new and free dialogue between the people of Cuba and Bulgaria.

This is especially important since other two major Cuban associations in Bulgaria, which were established by people and artists who used to live and work in Cuba under communism, follow literally the romantic propaganda of Castro's regime without any mention of human rights and new trends on the island.

Our aim was to reach a variety of people, especially young people, and that is why we turned to the language of film and literature. The six films shown in two days featured Benigno - Farewell to a Revolution, Suite Habana, Sin Embargo and the short documentaries Nada Con Nadie, Jose Manuel, la Mula y el Televisor and La Maldita circunstancia. More than 200 people attended the screenings of the Cuba Libre Days. Bulgarian national television, for the first time, aired information about the current situation on the island and about the Cuba Libre events.

The other big public event that was the translation and premiere of the book "Dirty Havana Trilogy" by Pedro Juan Gutierrez, the first book of the series "New Cuban Literature" by Janet-45 Publishing House. After being translated into 15 languages and becoming a

worldwide bestseller, the book is once again brining attention to the ugly realities of Cuba. It is also notable that this is the first book by a contemporary Cuban published in Bulgaria since the fall of the communist regime.

This topic has become banal to some extent for young people. The use of art

and cultural events to open a dialogue on Cuba is in tune with the current political landscape in Bulgaria, where the communist past still looms largely without proper reflection.

For more, please refer to www.cubalibrebg.org.

THE FIRST SOLIDARITY GUIDE OF CUBA

The editorial Aduana Vieja and the Spanish NGO Solidaridad Española con Cuba published the first Solidarity Guide of Cuba. The authors are Ricardo Carreras Lario and María Ángeles Altozano, president and communications director of the NGO.

It is the first guide of its kind on any country, and it combines tourist information with detailed data about Cuban political prisoners and their relatives. It includes information about the dignified Damas de Blanco, human rights activists, churches, donation centers, independent libraries and the emerging Cuban civil society. It shows the other Cuba that is hidden by the Cuban government and not shown by other Cuba guides. This innovative initiative is organized by provinces and contains unique information about the island and some facts unfamiliar to the usual traveller.

Solidaridad Española con Cuba has been promoting Solidarity Travel for two years now. The slogan of this concept is "if you go to Cuba, go well," which in Spanish has the double meaning of travelling well and also seeing the reality well. The first electronic version of the guide was released in

2006. It was downloaded by over 15,000 people and has now been translated by different NGOs into French, English, Polish and German.

The new version now published includes more information, such as recommendations for medicines and books to donate. The objective is to open the eyes and hearts of the traveller, so that he or she expresses solidarity with all these noble and suffering people by writing them a letter, bringing books, medicine or human solidarity.

We would like to thank People in Need, who provided us with the beautiful pictures of Las Damas de Blanco. We would also like to thank Angel García, who provided the photo of the cover page, and artist Aristides Miguel Pumariega Montes, who provided his painting of Picasso, as well as Cuban independent photographer Carlos Serpa Maceira, who sent us the photo of Laura Pollán and Berta Soler from Cuba that appears on the back. To all of them, thank you very much.

And to those travelling to Cuba just one recommendation: "If you go to Cuba, go well; if you go to Cuba, support them."



Photo by Lobo

Havana

CUBA-EUROPE DIALOGUES is now available in a new online version at www.cubalog.eu



- NEWS** Your weekly selection of the Cuban independent press. Roundup of the headlines. Comments by prominent authors and dissidents.
- CUBA/EU** Upcoming and past events by European NGOs. Policy papers and studies of EU-Cuba relations.
- DIALOGUES** Online version of the bulletin, extra studies, comments and reactions.
- HUMAN RIGHTS** Updates on the human rights situation. Online resources.
- MEDIA** A choice of exclusive articles for your media and service for foreign journalists.