



cuba — europa

dialogues

Semestral bulletin on relations between Cubans and Europeans

volume 7 | issue 15

index

- the old lady europe 4
- inspiration for revolution 6
- cuba and europe: affinities and disparities 9
- the myth opens towards the world 13
- the resonance of the dissidents' voices 17
- the berlin wall has already fallen 20
- the unknown continent of my grandfather 23
- our daily bread 26
- the europe of liberty 29
- human rights report: june – november 2011 32



Todo aquel que de refugio
a un terrorista es **TERRORISTA**

the old lady europe

These days, when so many Europeans pack their luggage and set out for the Caribbean, perhaps with destination Cuba, to escape cold, grey winter days, I can't help wondering where would the inhabitants of the *Pearl of the Caribbean* travel for holiday. Yet, the island's beaches of fine sand merging with the bright blue horizon that attract millions of tourists every year don't provide a complete picture of the country.

In this issue, we have decided to show you how Cubans themselves see the other side of the Atlantic. We have turned the mirror on the islanders and asked some independent Cuban journalists to give us their view of Europe.

What do the inhabitants of the beautiful island think of Europe, which for many of them represents the world of happiness, beauty and revolutionary ideals? In other words, how does the "*Mulatto woman*" see the "*old lady*"? It seems that each of the contributing authors has some personal aspirations that might appear surreal from the point of view of everyday Cuban reality.

Cuba is a myth, a great legend about free, high-quality social services. Yet, year by year it loses thousands of its inhabitants who flee into exile, their feet "voting" against the country's political representatives who have prevented them from expressing their disapproval in regular elections.

However, the government's promises, which took form of licenses to establish a business, buy or sell a home, or legally acquire a car, seem to herald a gradual change in the rules of the political-economic game it has been playing. Yet, only in time will we see the impact of these measures on the lives of the Cuban citizens.

The addressed journalists were asked to reflect on any feature of Europe that would come to their mind. Since the topic was thus broad, it has given origin to a great variety of articles covering various topics ranging from family sto-



ries to tribute to Václav Havel, the Czech ex-president who has passed away recently. In general, the authors have idealized Europe. Nevertheless, it might be useful for us, the Europeans, to read about the hope that many Cubans pin on the continent whose history and culture has so profoundly influenced and inspired them.

Present-day Europe is attractive for its courage and openness to dialogue and also for its capacity to live at present and to reflect – these are all values which, for whatever reason, are absent in Cuba.

Seen from abroad, Europe has much to offer. Although it has been currently absorbed in its own problems, it shouldn't lose its self-confidence and bow its head in shame, by which it would disappoint its ardent admirers.

We hope that these articles will arouse your interest. Perhaps, after reading the last page, you will be so inspired as to buy a ticket to Cuba to escape the cold weather and discover the natural beauty of the island and have a chat with the Cubans about the bitter-sweet taste of sugar, coffee and life in Cuba... ↩

inspiration for revolution

The fact that Europe has been so persistent in its efforts to ensure respect for human rights in Cuba and give Cubans freedom and democracy can be credited, beyond any doubt, to a few leaders who appeared at the political scene of Europe after the collapse of the socialist block. Drawing on their own experience, these leaders have been giving Cubans a practical example of the possibility of building a better world.

One of the leaders known for fighting against communism is Vaclav Havel, who has become an important source of inspiration for the Human Rights Movement in Cuba.

Havel's life is full of interesting stories that show the extraordinary humanity of this remarkable man. A man who has left a timeless heritage for the future generations: A regime's opponent can become the president of the country and rise from prison to the Prague Castle literally overnight.

Havel was used to telling the truth, and he kept telling it when he became the country's leader. He knew how to combine his intellect with his political aspirations. He wasn't a traditional politician; rather, he was a political intellectual capable of addressing the most significant issues of power.

Ever since Cuban dissidents learned about Havel thanks to an illegal copy of his book *The Power of the Powerless*, which passed from hand to hand and was rather studied than read, he has become their teacher, always reminding them that politics should be part of the conscience and the truth. "There's no need to lie in politics," he says in his book.

When Havel visited the United States in February 1990, we felt how close he was to Cuba. There, in the land of Abraham Lincoln, the democratic leader was honoured. Yet, he couldn't visit the land of Jose Marti because the totalitarian dictatorship had prohibited it. Nevertheless, the hearts of many Cubans

Tania Diaz Castro [→](#)

rejoiced. We were grateful to him for giving us an example, for encouraging us to move forward.

I personally have a sad experience that bonds me and this great man together: In 1977, when Havel was imprisoned for illegally published books, over a hundred Cuban writers (including me) were expelled from the Cuban Writers and Artists Union (UNEAC) because the government thought them untrustworthy.

Later, in 1989, we learned about Havel's activities in the Civic Forum and our dead soul locked up in Fidel Castro's cell got a boost of strength and dynamism.

Havel has achieved many accomplishments as a democrat and freedom fighter. In 1991, when the last Soviet soldier left Czechoslovakia, the Czechs opened the doors to the European Union, which they formally joined in 2004. Since then, the economy of the country has been one of the most developed in the continent.

I visited Prague in 1964; it's one of the oldest and most beautiful capitals I've seen in my life – it's been there for thousand years! I drank some good beer in Moravia and crystal-clear water in Karlovy Vary and I came to admire one of the Czech writers, Franz Kafka. By then, Vaclav Havel had already established himself as a playwright, but I had no idea he existed. Yet, I discovered him later, when I needed him most. ←





cuba and europe: affinities and disparities

“This is the most beautiful land that human eyes have ever seen.” These were the first impressions of the Italian admiral Christopher Columbus when he beheld the land, which is now known as Cuba, from the deck of his ship in his first journey, whose purpose was to discover new lands. The paradise-like vegetation made his eyes glow with joy and he named the island “Juana”.

Columbus set sail on August 3, 1492, from the town of Palos de la Frontera, which lies in the region of Huelva in the south-west of the Iberian Peninsula. More than two months later, the sailor Rodrigo de Triana finally cried out: “Land ho!” It was on October 12, 1492. The land he sighted was a small island of the Lucayan Archipelago (Bahamas) known by the native people as “Guanahani” and later renamed by Columbus to San Salvador. Weeks after that they discovered the land now known as Cuba and also the island, which is now inhabited by two nations, the Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Columbus, Genoese navigator and cartographer in service of the Castilian Crown, has thus become a prophet of a new era in the history of mankind. Thanks to him, America stepped out of anonymity and embarked on a process that would have paradoxical consequences. The continent entered the orbit of civilization and jumped over the barrier of primitivism but, at the same time, it has become a source of cheap raw materials and slave labour. Its native inhabitants were soon exterminated as a result of over-exploitation and diseases brought by the colonizers. To make up for the shortage of labour force in cane fields, the colonizers started to import African slaves under a law passed in 1512.

Jorge Olivera Castillo, writer and journalist →

The Cuban nationality has thus developed from the Spanish, Africans, and marginally also from the Indians living in the island on the arrival of Columbus. As a result, the history and culture of Cuba have been marked by the influence of Europe from the very beginning. Remnants of phrases, attitudes or wit of the Spanish ancestors and the people forcibly brought from West Africa can still be found in the popular imagination, and so does a range of negative attributes associated with them.

At present, Cuban national identity is a quality gradually washed away by the flow of hundreds of thousands of citizens determined to leave the country once and for all. For example, over 100,000 Cubans have recently become Spanish citizens after a law was passed allowing them to acquire Spanish nationality if any of their relatives was born in the Iberian Peninsula.

Yet, Spain is not the only country that a lot of Cubans crave after. Any place in Europe is idealized similarly as Columbus idealized the territory he saw from the deck of his ship in one of his adventurous journeys, when he said the immortal phrase.

Sadly, Cuba is no longer the “most beautiful land human eyes have ever seen.” If it were so, there wouldn’t be masses yearning to cross the Atlantic using any means they could find, even in the undercarriage of an aircraft, which has actually occurred several times in the last half century. Needless to say, such mad attempts have had very few survivors who could give evidence of their flight.

Any corner of the “Old Continent” will do to serve an average Cuban to nourish the fantasy, arrange temporal residence or just wait for the right time to apply for a change of citizenship, provided that plans of evasion have been successfully nailed down. The only thing they need to crown

with success the plans they’ve been preparing for years, adapting them over and over again to appearing and disappearing possibilities and chances, is a letter of invitation, an arranged marriage or an international mission, which would give them an opportunity to legally leave the country.

The reasons that we shouldn’t forget when carrying out an objective analysis of the causes of the refusal of Cubans to continue living under the rule of a party that has held the exclusive power in the country since 1959 include immigration control, which restricts free movement of Cubans across the border, and discrimination against Cuban citizens with regard to social and labour issues (in comparison to foreign countries).

The amount of people wishing to leave the country and never return, or, if ever, as visitors, could be considered evidence of the low support that the Cubans show to the ruling elite.

For Cubans, Europe has become one of the last resorts, helping them to ease the pressure of living under the dictatorship that has brought the country into material and spiritual poverty and giving them hope they could perhaps get rid of it one day. Even if these hopes were unrealistic, it would be very hard to take them away from the minds of those who cling to them.

We still remember the last waves of Spanish immigrants after the end of the War of Independence (1895-1898), which culminated in the establishment of the Republic of Cuba in 1902. The course of the flow has now been reversed. In the last 20 years, over 300,000 Cubans have definitely left the country. Their most frequent destinations include the United States, Spain and Italy; yet, it needs to be pointed out that any potential traveller would go anywhere, regardless of the weather, social status or other impediments.

No wonder that in this environment of social disintegration there are only a few citizens committed to fighting for human rights and trying to rectify various adverse situations that threaten the existence of Cuba as a nation. The majority of the Cubans opts for leaving the country, taking as few risks as possible. Would it be possible for Europe to increase its support for the people who are trying to reverse the appalling situation from within?

People deprived of the freedom of speech, association and movement and condemned to a life of subsistence, which can only be achieved by illegal ways, cannot be stopped from fleeing to other countries or adopting a double-standard attitude as a means of defence against the terror spread by the political police.

Despite the fact that the support provided by Europe to small and active democratic forces in Cuba has been uneven, it has played an important role in helping the country to a transition to democracy. Europe is now challenged to prove its commitment by increasing its gradual and moderate, yet firm efforts and gestures.

After over 100 years of being a republic, Cuba continues suffering consequences of a crisis that has hit the economy, politics and the society, and that has endangered preservation of the most important elements of national identity, which has been establishing itself since the discovery of America in 1492.

Cuban dissidents expect slightly more support from European policy makers who have realized the need to remove the regime, which has been dragging the country down. A regime, which has abolished democratic mechanisms to be able to establish a new order to definitely codify mediocrity and poverty.

The silent outflow of people from Cuba speaks for itself. No one would leave a country that is a marvel of beauty, as Columbus said.

Plenty of time has passed and now there are many areas in Cuba whose landscape would be far from deserving praise.

If you doubt my words, just ask any Cuban – and if you want to obtain a reliable answer, make sure you ask discreetly: “Will it take long before you pack your luggage and set out for Europe?” ←



the myth opens towards the world

In his visit to the island in January 1998, His Holiness John Paul II, who had a great share in the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe, the Pope whom faithful Cuban Catholics and the whole Cuban nation in general dearly loved, made a loud proclamation, which everyone hoped to become the Golden Rule for democratic modernization of the country: “May Cuba open itself up to the world, and may the world open itself up to Cuba...”

Over a decade later, both the observers from abroad and the inhabitants of the island themselves (i.e., the very protagonists), might be fooled by what they see. Despite the outflow of the Cubans to a definitive exile (with frequent visits, of course), the nation has remained trapped in a bubble of blessed ignorance.

There seem to be so many people who feel so strongly about Cuba that nobody cares to hear the truth about it any more. At present, Cuba is more a myth than reality, regardless whether seen from the White House or the European Parliament. The country is more a matter of faith than loyalty, both for right radicals and naive leftists. Yet, since the very year 1959, Cubans have been dreaming about moving to the “absurd First World” (as Fidel Castro once called it). Leaving the country is not only seen as a life change, but as a goal in itself (i.e., a blind flight has become a life’s goal: an individual rather jumps to the unknown instead of suffering any of the failed concepts of the Revolution).

Indeed, Cuba has opened itself up to the world and the world has opened up to Cuba; yet, the meaning of the Pope’s words has become corrupted. It’s a sad fact that each of the utopian and ultimately despotic experiments in the history of the mankind has proven to be cruelly ironic.

Now, in 2012 it is perfectly natural for any Cuban, no matter if it’s an ordinary citizen or somebody from the ruling elite, to watch the invasion of two million

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo →

tourists who annually come to visit the island. Every day, the Ministry of Interior issues an avalanche of private passports – most of them bear the humiliating “Permission of Exit” or “Permission of Entry” (procedure used for political blackmailing of critics of the regime or exiled citizens). Thousands and thousands of students of many nationalities come to Cuba to study at a university or undergo medical treatment. However (or, because of this apparent porosity), the curtain of misconceptions about Cuba now looks thicker than ever. Similarly, the notion that the Cubans have of the “free world” out there has become a sterile mirage, or, at best (and at worst) a big blunder.

It’s like peeking at the reality through an inverted telescope or a magnifying glass with distorted optics. In Cuba it’s hard to live in present. On the one hand, the official media is obsessively trying to manipulate information – a typical feature of Stalinist systems. On the other hand, the inertness and apathy passed from generation to generation has thrown Cuba in a state of paralysis.

For instance, the image of the political map of Europe kept in our collective subconscious hasn’t changed since the last century and millennium, that is, since 1989. It is therefore still common to hear (even with certain pride of a time machine which is aware of being wrong but refuses to be updated) expressions like “Czechoslovakia”, “Yugoslavia”, sometimes even the “Soviet Union”, etc.

It also seems that for some time we have been unable to learn the names of the presidents of the countless European democracies. The surnames of the royal families always surprise us as if they were some breaking news. The European capitals continue to be one of the mysteries pertaining to the academic world, except for the well-known axis Berlin-Rome-London-Paris-Madrid. To make

things worse, we imagine each the European countries as a compact monolith, perhaps it’s because we suffer from some sort of insular complex and expect that the nations speak one language, have one a national idiosyncrasy, and adhere to one single neo-liberal, social-democratic ideology.

For us, the Cubans, the heroism and horrors of the two World Wars or the gloomy death rattles of the Cold War are just food for moths – information about some time in the past with no practical connection to the present, which has left so many people in an unstable life situation. Yet, at least one thing makes us happy: since no-one remembers when, Europe seems to have one currency called almost the same as the continent: *Euro*. On the other hand, the unpronounceable names on the visas all look the same to us; nevertheless, they are the most coveted thing (culturally?) that can enable us to insert ourselves somewhere in the middle of the circle of nobody-knows-how-many gold stars on the blue flag.

So, we would like to implore Europe that it stay there for us, like an attracting magnet on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Yes, we know about the crisis and unemployment, about riots and balkanization, xenophobia and the NATO, about terrorism and the Mafia. Yet, at the same time we seek any possible kinship, or a kind of baptismal certificate of our grandparents that would help us become citizens of the civilization raised to its peak. Cuba in its paraplegic state of perfect peace, undisturbed for half a century, is seen by the Cubans as pure barbarism. The tedious monotony makes us flee to whatever forgotten corner of the First World we can find.

From the intellectual point of view, it may seem paradoxical that right-wing European governments usually carry out progressive-liberal diplomatic programmes in Cuba; on the other hand, the European left-wing leaders usually

yield to the dictate of the governing elite in the island and are seen by our budding civil society as ultimately conservative-reactionary.

Our most immediate reference point – an alternative to the local absolutist model, is the United States of America. Since the 1960s we have had had real-time access to anything from music hit parades to the next election slogan of Barack Obama despite the anti-technology barriers imposed by our abusive Criminal Code. Then again, Europe has been keeping us updated with much greater delay, which is actually the reason why it has retained its veil of mystery of an ancient metropolis, a maternal womb, in which we want to rest at least once more before we die.

Most inhabitants of the archipelago CUBAG as well as people from abroad may have forgotten the emphatic words pronounced by Pope John Paul II in January 1998. All in all, we don't really seem to be in need of the holy man's advice. In more ways than one, we have actually beaten his wisdom: although Cuba has not opened up to the world, it has opened up to the thousand and one Cubas created all over the world (i.e., through the vast network of embassies, pro-government NGOs, campaigns and movements expressing solidarity with our fifty-year Revolution, leaders incubated in Cuba, etc.).

We have always tried to adapt the Third World to the image of our socialist system able to survive any debacle. Maybe it's now time to Cubanize Europe a bit. ↩





the resonance of the dissidents' voices

Cuba is the small island not easily located in the Caribbean and the big prey of the new world division. I can hear often that the island is sieged by the greedy appetite of the empire, its eternal enemy. Other superpowers in the great Europe also intrigue to get some prey.

What a nice introduction of a science fiction novel. Anyway, the Cubans, we feel to be the belly of the world, thanks to the passion for persuasion by the socialist government. "The small nation is sieged and stands the attempts to be dominated." How lyric and melodramatic. In reality we are the biggest of the Antilles, but not even important or well known among the citizens of this world.

Here is located the problem of the ones who decide to tell, from inside and with hidden face, about what they feel and think. How to make the world hear us, inside this big works called Socialist Revolution, without the equipment which would permit us to work with the new information technologies? How can we show the other face of the system and the irascible eyes of the repression?

This is not a question of patriotism. This is a must. A human being is nothing if he cannot express himself. Anyway, the problem remains; how to sharpen the hearing of the outer world among the reached values, such as free health and education. The resonance is the only form how to amplify our voices.

Apart from the methods, positions, including also the lobby of the diplomats and politics, it is fair to recognize that in Europe and the United States there are many people who help us multiply our voice, surmounting the cultural and linguistic differences. We are also sure that many times we are not able to appreciate it; we do not know the value and the reach of the help.

In my personal level, I appreciate your presence where we cannot be, your help to get the travelling permit and to tear down the limits of the Ministry of

Laritza Diversent →

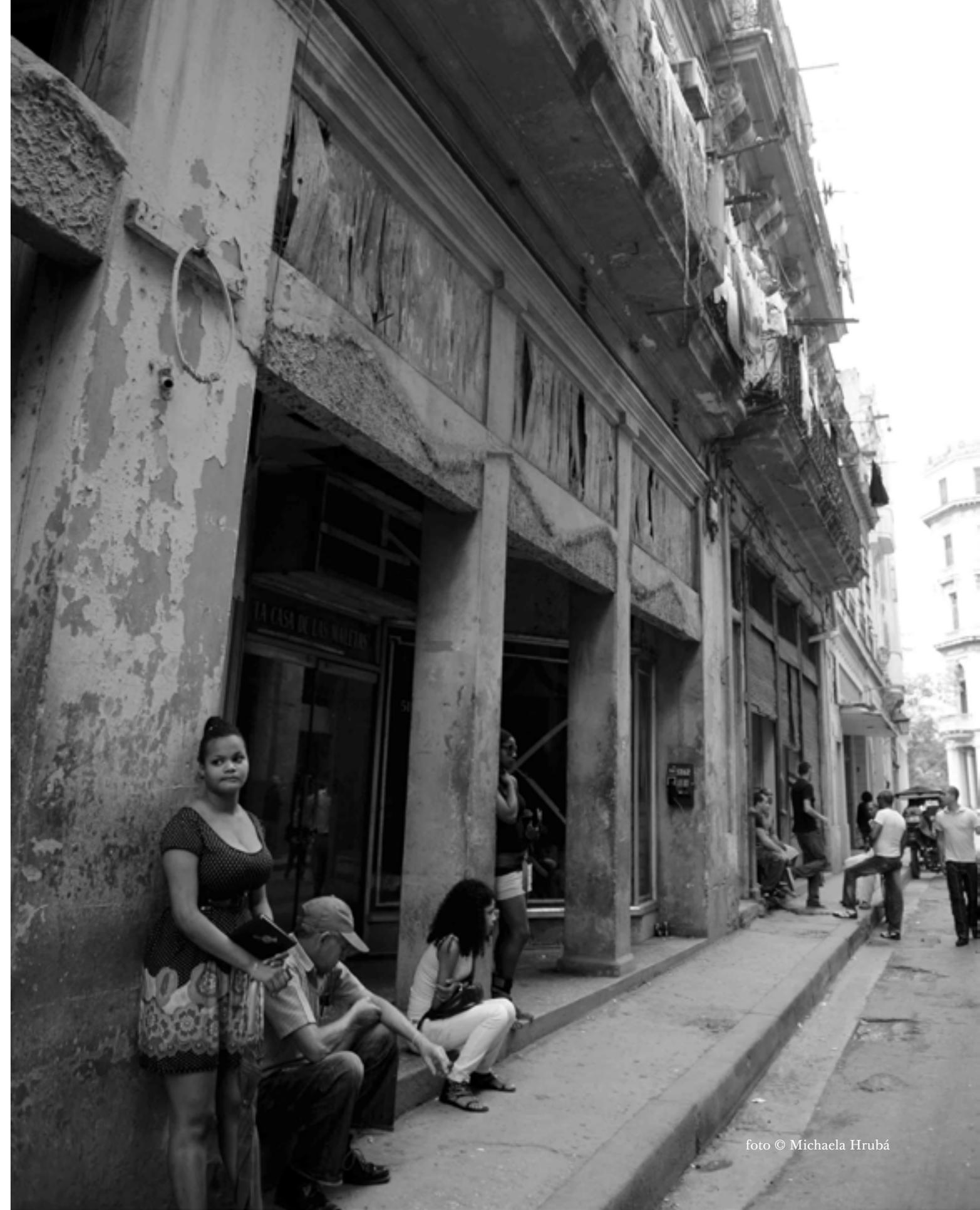
Interior. I also know that many of us expect more. Some of them expect more aggressive Europe, and some less irreconcilable United States. However, we want little or nothing from ourselves.

This help has much further reach. It eliminates the solitude when friends fear to be with you, to prevent being marked by the State Security. Only God knows how many times I ask myself, whether the things I do are worth it. The attention of the external world is felt like a pat on the back, which supports you to go on.

The concern and help from overseas, in my opinion, are important factors for our struggle for the liberty. They show, as if we were the other part of a coin: the smacks received by the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco), arbitrary detentions, conditions of political prisoners, persecution of journalists, the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo and now of Laura Polán.

In the part which concerns me, I don't only appreciate, but also admire those from exterior world, who support us, the Cuban dissidents, either morally or with material aid; especially those who know the risks and enter Cuba and contact us.

I am not interested in the background, if there was, for me, it is pure altruism. If my situation was different, I do not know whether I was interested in those who suffer the repression in this world, and the pity fact is that there are not just few of them. For this reason, I express thousands of thanks for those in the exterior world, who create the resonance the voice of Cuban dissidence. ←





the berlin wall has already fallen

Havana. The Cuban opposition continues the fight for the fall of the Castro dictatorship wall, which holds the power for 52 years. For this reason, it looks to the horizon from where tens of histories came – histories which send a clear message and give ideas – histories told by friends from developed Europe, after the fall of the Berlin wall, which celebrates its 22nd anniversary.

In Cuba there circulate tens of documentary movies about what happened in Europe; with an excellent acceptance by the public. Although the authorities ruled by the government know them, they do not publish them in cinemas or on TV, for similarities with the reality on the Island.

Examples of the images: The Gestapo, a documentary whose name had to be changed because of the Department of Cuban State Security or by the Cuban Communist Party; The Life of the Others, a movie which shows persecution by government agents against intellectual dissidents. The scene repeats. Another one: The Last Days of Franco, a dictator who executed thousands of Spanish people in order to keep the power. The same thing happened in Cuba. And, The Life Is a Miracle, an Italian story about a family which was taken to a concentration camp, where the father tries to make his child believe that they are in a competition and they will win a prize. A prize we are trying to get; The Liberty.

Tears are descending on the cheeks of those who are watching the movies and a knot is creating in the throat. Histories that repeat everyday in the Island, but people do not know them well because of the censorship and the control of the regime.

It makes us sad what has happened in Europe, the thing which is happening in Cuba nowadays – in reality where the majority of the Cubans walk with heads down, lacking food, medicines, transport, without liberties, without all

Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez →

that rights, and closed in the big concentration camp where all the dissidents are oppressed and jailed.

In my Cuba, there are shadows in the streets, the movement of unemployed increases, of people strolling without knowing where to go, of prostitution, and also of the young who intend to leave the country illegally risking their lives, of the elderly who beg for charity, of the displaced ones, of the political prisoners, of the falling buildings, of the people who dissent, up to the ones who are in the line of the Communist party.

All this happened in Europe, but there, the lights are clearer everyday, since the fall of the wall which brought the end of communism. This community sends us a message, as well as the revolutions in orient countries; Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

For the Cubans, Europe is a symbol of wish, hope, fight; and although the Cuban infantry counts with a help from her citizens and many diplomatic seats of the 26 integrated countries, we want them to make more, not to leave us alone, to break together our wall which is approaching its end, thanks to you, Europeans. 🇪🇺





the unknown continent of my grandfather

Since my childhood I always heard of my grandfather Lilvio the island man, sure from the Spanish Canary Islands, who had come to Cuba to find his fortune. The history of my family and my grandpa is repeated in every Cuban family, some have family from Galicia, others from Africa.

But like all young Cubans I asked myself hundred times what is the old continent like, its habits, culture. To tell the truth, in the mind of the young people who appear in the Havana district in front of a camera lens of a European, they tell: “My God, I wish I travelled a bit, not as a tourist, but in the Cuban way, to escape from the misery, to work and send one or two Euro to my family, to make their lives better.”

“Yaquelin, my friend since childhood,” living in Rome, Italy, I better don’t say how she met and married an Italian, a father of their two children now.

Today she tells me, she knows almost all of Europe, she makes me overwhelmed when she speaks about Venice, Paris, the castles, the English culture, among other things she has lived in those few years on the old continent.

Nevertheless, the only thing I have to tell my friend Yaquelin is: “All remains the same; Yaque, Cuba is not moving.” The thing is not only about not knowing Europe; the worst thing is that the Europeans do know my marvelous island and its beaches, accompanied with the pretty women. How sad that these tourists, workers, the medium class people or even the rich ones, they do not know that thousands of young people like me, we do not know our island, the worst thing is that we have less rights and human value than they have here on the island where we were born. The reality is cruel, but it is the only one; for the Cubans, Europe is a place of a dream of escape towards prosperity, but to be able to reach it, one has to be a descendant of the Spanish and obtain the citizenship, or find through prostitution or other losses of hu-

Lilvio Fernández Luis →

man valor, somebody from the first world, who gets you a ticket to the liberty and prosperity.

The difference between me and many Cubans is that I have good friends in Europe, they know me, they know my island, and they are my friends. For reasons I do not understand, but the government does, I do not know the nice lakes, the marvelous mountains, and I cannot even imagine what they tell me about the big cities full of hundreds years of history.

Alright, all I can tell my children about Europe and “God wants not to my grandchildren,” is that my name is Lilvio, the same name as my grandpa’s, who came here from the Spanish Canary Island, and I have great friends in Europe.

From my Cuba 🇨🇺





our daily bread

When I was a child, my grandfather told me that his grandfather had come from Spain back in 1830, on a ship named El Andaluz. He decided to continue the family tradition and founded a bakery in the street Neptuno.

At that time, some parts of the street were made of earth and others of cobbled stones until they were covered with asphalt in the end of the century. Then trams were constructed, drove on the rails on the street, crowded with people, and making lots of noise.

My grandfather's grandfather's name was Arénico, a rare name, which caused me serious problems.

My grandfather was always remembered with an unlit tobacco butt in his mouth, with a beret cap, a raincoat, drunk of wine, playing bagpipe and castanets, singing songs he knew from his childhood in Asturias, boasting about his force when he was young. He said that once he had killed a horse. He also narrated histories about his ancestors from Asturias who always baked bread, a tradition which passed from generation to generation and which stopped with me. All I am interested in bread is how to find it in a bakery every morning as an immediate food to be eaten in hurry.

The money from the Neptuno street business allowed the Asturian to conquest a mulatto girl from Belascoaín. He constructed a house above the bakery, married her, and they had a family: Hortensia, Inmaculada, Pepe, and Paco, who were born, grew, and died there.

There remain only old and very blurry photos of Inmaculada and Hortensia when adolescent, one of my grandfather holding in his hands Paco, recently born, and another one of Pepe, taken before he died in a war. But there is not even a portrait of Arénico, and it is pity, I wish I could see the face of the man

Frank Correa →

who made me take many buses, seek in archives, suffer bureaucratic problems, and pay all of my little money.

In reality this Odyssey had started a long time ago, in the sixties, when the revolutionary acts confiscated the family bakery, and my grandfather, who was very old, died of sadness.

In a moment, my father turned from the owner to a state employee, with a monthly salary. He retired in the nineties in the same bakery, which had been his property before.

From Arénico till me, the bread was our salvation. I remember my dad coming up when he finished his shift at work. He would teach me how to eat it in many manners: with lard, with sugar, with garlic, with onion, with salt, with chícharos, or plain.

Like his ancestors, my father knew all the secrets of bread production. In the Municipal Factory of Flour and its Derivates, in the Center of Havana, every time when the dough went bad in any bakery, they called him to make it correct.

My father was able to make good bread with any type of flour. And when the state modified the technological formula, reducing fat, salt, sugar, yeast and baking time, in order to save prime materials, my father always assisted to keep making good bread.

Later, when he retired, he continued giving his knowledge to the factory, but at that time it was impossible to make good bread. Corruption and illegal business ended the magic of the bowl, which would grow since the wee hours in the fermentation room and with the red lighted bricks in the oven, when the home-made bread was made.

One day, before he died, he told me to find a way to go to Spain, because at that time, it was impossible to make bread here.

You come from there. Find a way to get back.

One day, a friend told me that Spain proclaimed the act of grandsons. Thousands of young Cubans like me were desperate for their Hortensias, Inmaculadas, Pepes, and Pacos, for being rescued from the disaster which destructed the island. This was an act valid for one year, and I ran for the traces of Arénico.

I walked many months, searching archives, asking notary inscriptions of birth, marriage certificates, decreases, but there was always missing something. When I completed the mission, the state employees found in the documents errors in names: Arenio, Arsénico, Arínico. I had to ask a lawyer to undergo the complicated issue called Correction of errors, which lasted an infinity, and when it finished, it was still changed to: Arenico, Arnico.

The time of the act was expired with the name Arénico not being corrected, since then I am more desperate than ever, defeated, a prisoner. All the days I ask the same question: What did my grandfathers' grandfather come to find here? Why did not he calmly stay in Asturias?

If this had not happened, I would have been working in my family bakery, living a normal life. There would not have been this torture and persecuted grandson of the Spanish, lost on the remote island. 🚫



the europe of liberty

The vision of European countries by an average Cuban is proverbial. All the good things come from there: the music, folklore, habits, nice clothes and good food, literature, art, reasons, the culture in general.

For the vast majority of the Cubans, the Old world is the civilization. Many think that if the encounter of the European and American cultures had not happened, we would still be wearing loin-rags.

This perception is not limited to the Spanish and the Portuguese, it includes all the civilization development which appeared in all European countries, and is known in the popular image as the most useful and the best.

Starting in the Altamira Caves in Spain, till the Italian Renaissance, Industrial Revolution in England, the French Revolution, the two world wars, and the decline of the international communism, together with the Berlin wall, this is the scenery of the old and good Europe.

The satanic vision of the European behavior through thousands of years, as it is interpreted by the Cuban Authorities does not work here. Nor it works to accuse Europe for the ancient stealth of the Cuban and other continent countries' wealth.

For the Cubans, Europe does not mean only wars, Napoleón, Marx, Lenin, Chrchil, Hitler, Stalin, or Gorbatschov, it is also Vienna Waltz, the Eiffel Tower, the Prado Museum, and Colosseum in Rome.

Moreover, it includes the Angel Michael, Da Vinci, Durer, Gauguin, van Gogh, Goya, and of course Goethe, Zola, Nabokov, Kafka, Kundera, Herman Hess and Virginia Woolf.

Other vision of Europe is, despite the economical crisis, and the affected ones today, an attractive destination for emigration. It is the world, which got rid of the predatory communism and which permits to live in liberty.

Víctor Manuel Domínguez →

The velvet revolution in countries of East Europe was perceived in the Cubans' minds, anyway the Cuban Authorities attempt to present this liberating gesture as betray of real socialism doctrines.

Actually, the developments and steps back which appeared in entire Europe are observed by the Cubans. They enjoy to admire it, and fight for improvements, while Cuba falls into a deep sleep, in which it has been soaked for fifty years.

More than 160 000 Cubans which try to become Spanish citizens, and millions who see Europe as salvation, a dignified paradigm which is not conform with anything what brakes the liberty, this gives a perfectly clear vision European countries in Cubans' eyes.

Although the Cuban Authorities keep manipulating the acts and numbers in information media about the disasters which tremble Europe, the Cubans fell attracted by its scenario and its reality.

Though everything what exists or comes from foreign countries is exaggerated in many cases, the best of today's Cuba is incomparable with the worst what happens there in Europe.

None of the demands which are put in London, Rome, or Madrid, are impossible to happen here. The tradition to express one's opinions against the stream, this is a domain which the Cubans lost in the Revolution.

In general, Europe keeps the scenario which is dreamed by thousands of Cubans, not only for the contributions to the well being of the humanity, but also for the development and steps back, which show the unacceptability of any type of tyranny. ←





enero – november 2011

INTRODUCTION

Cuban government legalized purchasing and selling of real estate, for the first time during the almost 54 year-long revolution. This reform has the biggest potential to set for a change, being the most important in a series of capitalist-like adjustments to the socialist system promoted by President Raúl Castro. New system of small-business loans will be available to low-scale farmers since the beginning of December and allowance to buy and sell cars with government permission. These are other steps leading to demand of greater personal liberties. Private property as a cornerstone of capitalism may subsequently lead to mayor pressure on the Cuban National Assembly to ratify the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of United Nations and Civil and Political Rights which have been signed, however the not ratified. Any criticism by foreign NGOs or international organizations focusing on the human rights is denied by the Cuban authorities based on the argument of national sovereignty.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The government maintained the repression on the low scale, detaining the opposition activists for short periods of time as in the first half of the year. In the period of June to November almost two times more people have been detained when compared to the same period of the year 2010 - there was an alarming increase of 188 per cent in number of short time detentions for political reasons.

The main objective of detentions is in mostly to prevent opposition members from taking part in non-official gathering or manifesting against the government such as in case of Ladies in White. The second semester of 2011 was

particularly tense in the Eastern provinces where several *actos de repudio* took place.

According to the information released by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, September has been month with the highest frequency of detentions in last 30 years hitting the number of 563. October 14 marked a period of grievance for the opposition because Laura Pollán, leader of the non-violent movement of Ladies in White, passed away at the age of 63 due to the heart attack. Her sudden death leaves the movement and its supporters in doubts concerning the future leadership and activities. The University of Navarra, Spain awarded in October the 2010 Jaime Brunet Prize for the promotion of human rights to blogger Yoani Sánchez Cordero. Cuban authorities were asked by the National Sexual Education Center, or Cenesex, to accelerate the Parliament debate of a bill legalizing same-sex unions and promoting other rights for gays, lesbians and transgender. Seventeen Cuban of the ex-political prisoners who initially went into exile to Spain have moved to the United States. The principal motive was lack of job opportunities and connections drove them to join the largest community of Cuban exiles in Florida.

DETENTIONS

The regime took even a stronger position towards the opposition and answered any potential act of resistance with short term detention. During the period of June to November the number of detentions almost doubled if compared to the same part of the year 2010. It is not rare, that some dissidents are arrested for more than once in one month. There are 1794 documented arrests in the second half of 2011 and preliminary information about approximately

200 people being detained in relation with the International Human Rights Day on December 10th.

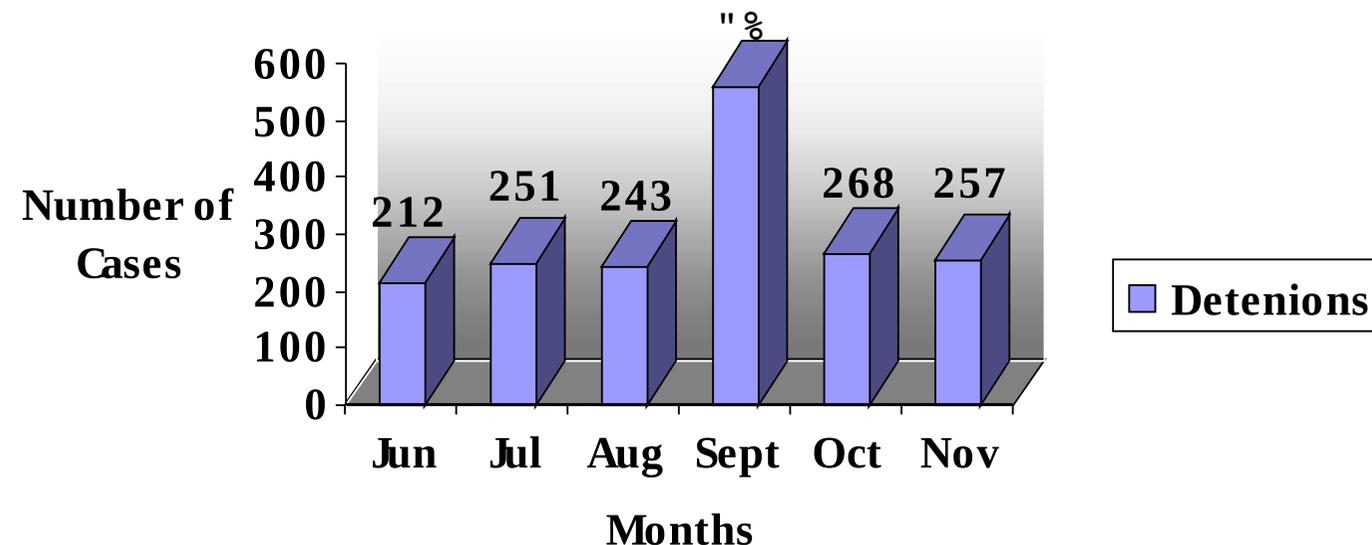
The mayor waves of “preventive measure” from the State security authorities were seen in the eastern provinces of Santiago de Cuba, in the neighborhoods of El Cobre and Palmarita Soriano. Secret police arrested at least 65 men and women during peaceful protests. Elizardo Sánchez, director of the island’s unofficial Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CHRNR) confirmed that at least once, in the town of Palma Soriano, security forces used either pepper spray or tear gas against one family. Starting on July, 17, the government took hard position in the Eastern provinces against the women visiting church for mass, praying for release of political prisoners, among them members of Ladies in White.

The month of September witnessed the highest frequency of detentions in 30 years. In total, 563 opposition activists were arrested, compared to 90 detained in September 2010 or to month average of 278 during the previous eight months.

Only in the period of four days, from 16th-19th September, there were reported 150 detentions for political reasons. The majority took place in the central region of Santa Clara; among the detained were Guillermo Fariñas and two political ex-prisoners Angel Moya Acosta and Librado Linares. Some of the detentions were prolonged up to 72 hours. Other detentions during the repressive wave took place in provinces of Pinar del Río, Bayamo and Holguín.

As a result, the number of political prisons grew by 12 new cases; these have been placed to prisons of high security, awaiting trials.

Documented Human Rights Abuses



Monthly overview of the most remarkable Human Rights cases in the period of June – November 2011.

Source: Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CHRNR)

CONDITIONAL AND OTHER RELEASES

After the announced end to the liberation of prisoners in April 2011, there were no major releases.

Only one political prisoner (Marcelino Rodríguez Vazquez) sentenced upon “crime against the State and terrorism” was conditionally released, after serving more than 15 years of the confinement.

At the end of November, seven of those who were detained, awaiting trial, were released without any charges.

According to the CHRNR, there are still approximately 70 reported political prisoners or processed on political cause, after 115 ex-political prisoners had left into exile until April 2011.

There are 17 ex-prisoners currently under “licencia extrapenal”- conditionally released.

MOST SIGNIFICANT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS LISTED BY MONTHS

Upon the fifth year of Raúl Castro’s governance the statistics prove that the situation of human rights has not improved. Cuba continues to hold the primacy in number of detentions upon political reasons.

June

- Damaris Moya and Iris Pérez Aguilera from the province of Villa Clara were victims of brutality of police forces. They suffered head and neck beatings as well as hits to back. As a consequence, Damaris Moya had to be hospitalized.
- No political prisoner was released.

July

- Intensive repressions in the provinces with less attention from the international observers.
- Political police interfered violently against participants of the pacific manifestation in the cities of Santa Clara, El Cobre y Palma Soriano on 13th, 17th and 24th of July.
- Upon the termination of the mass at the Sanctuary of el Cobre, the participating women left the church in two rows and they were attacked by the pro-government forces.
- The average number of short time detentions rose from 135 cases per month in 2010 to 282 cases per month in 2011 during the same period of January to July.

August

- The level of violence against the pacific dissidents was the highest in comparison to the previous years. The principal victims were women in the Eastern province of Santiago de Cuba who were professing their human rights of association and free expression.
- Various *Actos de repudio* took place in province of Santiago de Cuba. One of them was targeted on the group of 28 opposition activists who gathered to protest against the repression towards ladies in White and Ladies of Support. Nine of the participants were injured by the stones thrown during the *acto de repudio*.

September

- The highest score of detentions reaching the 30 years maximum of 563 in total.
- Jorge Luís Claro Galván was detained and beaten by the members of the Ministry of Interior in Gibara because of his public manifestation against the government. He was detained for few hours.
- Angel Moya Acosta, political ex-prisoner was detained by the political police for 60 hours because of his attempt to organize peaceful marches through the island.

October

- All along the island various oppositional activists were detained in order to prevent them from signing the condolence book dedicated to the family members of deceased Laura Pollán. The detention only took a few hours.

November

- Obayení Grant Guerra, his family members and members of Movement of Resistance and Democracy of Guantánamo experienced prolonged *acto de repudio* for two days, with high negative psychological impact. 🚫

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 studies of EU-Cuba relations.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Updates on the human rights situation. Online resources.

MEDIA

A choice of exclusive articles for your media and service for foreign journalists.

CUBA - EUROPE DIALOGUES

Semestral bulletin on relations between Cubans and Europeans / Volume 6, Issue 14

Published by People in Need, Prague, Czech Republic with support of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To obtain this bulletin in Spanish please visit www.cubalog.eu

Design: Carton Clan cartonclan.cz

TRANSITION
Transition Promotion Program

 **CUBALOG.EU**
OVERCOMING INFORMATION BLOCKADE

