

# The European Union and Spain policy towards Cuba, in the context of Castro's cession of power<sup>♦</sup>

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## I

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the policy of the European Union (EU) and its most prominent Member States towards Cuba, in the context of EU-U.S. relations and in the

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general setting of European-Latin American relations, has shown three fundamental aspects: (1) a reaffirmation of the contrast with the US confrontational policy (the US-Cuba confrontation is to be considered by Europeans as a bilateral issue to be resolved by these two parties; the EU opposes the US embargo and most especially its codification through extraterritorial laws such as Helms-Burton); (2) the EU has shaped its relationship with Cuba in the form of the so-called “constructive engagement”; and (3) the EU still conditions the development of a close development aid program to the reform of certain political and juridical fields and the respect of human rights; this critical attitude has been reinforced in recent years by the actions presented by some of the new MS previously under Soviet control. In each one of these avenues some MS have distinguished themselves as leaders of different approaches. However, individual moves and policies have not noticeably changed the overall picture of maintaining normal diplomatic relations with Cuba, and in some cases a close trade and investment relationship that has consistently irritated the US government.

While European and American policies coincide in wishing Cuba to become democratic, Europe has opted by a combination of incentives, persuasion and at times pressure, and conditional aid. The United States has consistently maintained the embargo imposed in the early 60s with the double negative results of reinforcing the hardening of the Cuban regime and clashing with European commercial and investment interests. This general picture does not mean that the relationship between Cuba and Europe has been excellent and free from problems, even in comparison with the US relationship. Brussels and some of the European governments have had their own load of conflict and lack of communication with the Cuban government. At the time of the announcement of Fidel Castro’s illness on August 1, 2006, that led to his temporary resignation from power, Cuba and Europe were in one of the most delicate moments of the otherwise mutually convenient relationship. The Cuban government, displeased by measures taken by Brussels in 2003 over a hardening of the Cuban policies towards dissidents, had the communication lines with the European embassies frozen, making deals and agreements difficult if not impossible. With the new situation created by Castro’s illness both actors were called to make an opening move.

In this setting, almost two years after the dramatic announcement of the illness, then temporary cession of power to Raúl, and eventual official “retirement” of Fidel, the relation between the EU and Cuba returned to a certain level of normalcy, untying a previous cycle of a freezing attitude expressed by the Cuban authorities and an attempt by European actors to influence or persuade Havana for an opening and the implementation of political and economic reforms.<sup>1</sup> After a prolonged period of a wait and see approach executed by Brussels and some of the most active European governments in the relationship with Cuba (led by Spain), some initiatives were taken with the result of an ambivalent response by the Cuban government, distinguishing between what was perceived as a positive move from certain governments and what has been interpreted as an aggressive attitude from others. However, when the special EU Council critical

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the first year of Castro’s illness: “La UE y Cuba, un año después” *El Nuevo Herald*, 21 julio 2007

[http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/columnas\\_de\\_opinion/story/68600.html](http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/columnas_de_opinion/story/68600.html)

conclusions were issued in June of 2007, including an offer made to the Cuban authorities to meet in Brussels, the answer from Havana was violently and publicly negative, topped by a column written by Fidel Castro. In sum, one year after the July 31 announcement regarding Castro's health, not much changed in essence, details and spirit in the peculiar relationship between Europe and Cuba. In spite of specific moves implemented by Madrid, the same assessment would be applied to the current chapter of the "special relationship" between Spain and Cuba.

However, a bold move was executed by the Spanish government towards Cuba during the Easter week of 2007, surprising European and U.S. observers as a major turn in Spain's policy since the PSOE's electoral victory in March of 2004. When most observers expected the impasse caused by the Castro's illness and his temporary absence from the public scene to last longer and invite an extended period of inaction and caution from an array of foreign actors, Spain decided to act. Although this did not change drastically the still cool European-Cuban relationship, it contributed to open a new chapter in the attitudes of Cuba towards Europe and in the shaping of a future European strategy in the context of the new Cuban political structure.

This individual initiative was not going to be an isolated national move. Several other events were to take place in early 2008, in the context of the elections for the National Assembly that named the new Cuban government without the inclusion of Fidel, and the executive promotion of his brother to the position of head of state. First, EU Commissioner Louis Michel, controlling the portfolio of Development and the ACP group (of which Cuba is a member) visited Havana and had high level talks. As we will see in the concluding pages, this was not going to be an isolated case of diplomatic moves.

These trips taken by Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and Commissioner Michel to Havana have to be seen within a wider context regarding the European perception of the Cuban scene that deserves to be considered.<sup>2</sup> This setting is basically composed of a reading of the string of events that have taken place since the announcement of Castro's illness and his cession of power, in addition to an in-depth analysis of general trends and dimensions of the Cuban fabric. The conclusion of this search will reveal that not much happened regarding the potential development of epoch-making events, or at least at the level of what was expected from a serious medical condition and the proximity of the eventual death of Castro. However, the impasse strengthened the conviction that Cuba's structural survival specificities and endemic shortcomings are still dominating the scene and will continue to influence the future development of the regime and the country at large, affecting the European attitude. Although the overall attitude of the United States towards Cuba did not change in a

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<sup>2</sup> For a reaction to the events, see these columns by the author: "La nueva actitud de España hacia Cuba", IPS 070405; *La Opinión de los Angeles*, 8 abril 2007

<http://www.laopinion.com/comentarios/?rkey=0000000000001466950>;

"Entre Bruselas y La Habana" *Nueva Mayoría*, 9 abril 2007

<http://www.nuevamayoria.com/ES/ANALISIS/?id=roy&file=070404.html>

*El Nuevo Herald*, 9 abril 2007 <http://www.elnuevo.com/211/story/28719.html>

"Cuba no necesita presiones", *Cinco Días* 21 octubre 2006

[http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/Cuba/necesita/presiones/cdscedi/20061021cdscdiopi\\_5/Tes/](http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/Cuba/necesita/presiones/cdscedi/20061021cdscdiopi_5/Tes/)

*El Nuevo Herald*, 9 abril 2007 <http://www.elnuevo.com/211/story/28719.html>

noticeable way since the crisis developed by the Castro's illness, some events initially revealed internal contradictions, erratic decisions and ambivalence towards the desires of different sectors of the Cuban exile community.

Regarding the relationship with Europe in general, the Cuban government reaffirmed its cool approach that it experimented with even after the lifting of the EU special measures in 2005. The government continued to place selective difficulties in the access of certain foreign representations to the high echelons of the regime. Meanwhile, the government-run media sporadically would send veiled or explicit attacks against certain European governments and then the EU as whole, accusing it of "conspiracy" with the policy of the United States. The EU Common Position still in effect since 1996 has been systematically equated with the standing U.S. embargo.

## II

### The European view and policy

#### A standing assessment

Any consideration of the EU-Cuba relationship, based on an analytical reading of the different alternatives open to European action and approach in a changing Cuba, must be placed in the setting of a minimum cluster of parameters regarding EU's perception of the political and economic situation of Cuba. This European view offers few surprises and contrasts with other analytical frameworks given by Latin American and U.S. observers. Some basic dimensions can be outlined, extracted from different opinions and studies emanating directly or indirectly from the EU's institutional establishment, as well as from independent origins.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the economic scene, the first concern expressed by European analysts, a feeling shared by international experts, is that the data of an endemic dysfunctional economy, as officially provided by Cuban authorities, are unreliable. The figures that are officially provided are considered outdated. Their much needed renewal and updating are subject to an extremely difficult and cumbersome task. The unilateral decision of the Cuban government to reformat the standard GDP formula has added more confusion and suspicion to the existing concerns. The Social Sustainable Gross Domestic Product (SSGDP) was announced in 2005 to have a growth of 11.8 %, clearly the highest in the world. The difference between this figure and the predicted ECLA's 5% is due to the

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<sup>3</sup> For a sample of the author's reactions after a visit to Havana in January of 2008, see: "Cuba: provisionalidad permanente"; [http://www.nuevamayoria.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=243&Itemid=52](http://www.nuevamayoria.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=243&Itemid=52) *El Nuevo Herald*, 6 febrero 2008. [http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/columnas\\_de\\_opinion/story/154951.html](http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/columnas_de_opinion/story/154951.html); "Cuba, sentido de nación" IPS, 4 febrero 2008; LOLA <http://www.laopinion.com/editorial/artopinion.html?rkey=0000000000003223260> *El Nuevo Herald*, 18 febrero 2008 <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/opinion/story/161633.html>

benefits rendered by the medical services provided by Cuba to Venezuela.<sup>4</sup> According to Cuban sources, the SSGDP reflected an increase of 12.5 percent, expecting to be 10 percent in 2007. According to well-founded rumors, the Cuban government has been planning to end the double use of local currency, claiming that 57 percent of the population already received hard currency.<sup>5</sup> However, a series of trade and social modifications (cell phones, access to property of dwellings, raise of pensions) to the limitations imposed on the Cuban population were implemented under great expectation of more important measures to come.

With respect to the political evolution, the European analysis is similar to the one emanating from Latin America and the independent scholarly and think-tank community in the United States. It contemplates three distinct scenarios that could develop in stages at the same time. Considered as a set, these possible chapters of the new historical Cuban era may have subtle spillover effects according to the pace of the events derived from the announcement of the Castro's illness.

The first scenario is the one that survived over the months since August 2007, and it was extended for the rest of 2007, and spilled over 2008 leading to the dramatic announcement of Castro's retirement. The power structure was for a while, according to an adaptation of a French expression converted in part of the terminology to describe the equilibrium of the European institutions, a "ménage a deux". With Fidel apparently recovering and periodically reappearing in video clips in the company of Chávez, while alleged details of his health are filtered to the international press, something is obviously certain regarding political control. The reigns of government, at least pertaining to the-day-to-day functions, had been under the control of Raúl and his collaborators, as delegates of precise duties. In essence, this analysis corrected in a certain degree the assessment made right after the announcement of Castro's illness that nothing would be the same in the Cuban scene.<sup>6</sup> For that, one would have to wait for a more drastic biological change.

In the European analysis, the balance of the performance of Raúl Castro is that in the first stage was an equal in the leadership level, but he did not appear any longer to be merely No. 2. However, this did not mean that he had the maneuvering space he would face once his brother physically and terminally would completely disappear from the scene. Fidel's "presence of his absence" (to use a metaphor developed by insiders) was too strong to consider his brother's role autonomous and decisive. There was no clear consensus in the European analysis to interpret Raúl's scant words in his infrequent appearances and addresses. It is not difficult to believe that Fidel systematically contacted the different ministers handling portions of the authority delegated by him. This apparently overbearing influence was amplified after Castro's resignation.

The reality offered by this scenario is that European observers recognized that they knew the same as U.S. analysts did and still do –not much. The Cuban government gave few signals to Brussels for taking a new approach and speeding up the

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<sup>4</sup> From various EU sources.

<sup>5</sup> Andrea Rodríguez, "Estudian en Cuba poner fin a la doble circulación de moneda", *El Nuevo Herald*, 29 abril 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See Roy, "From stubbornness..."

implementation of new measures, offer new alternatives, and announce new incentives or pressure. The only clear detail was that Raúl Castro reaffirmed during all this time his intention of tackling what he called the imperfections and violations of the system, a threat that was denounced a year earlier by his brother as the most dangerous challenge posed for the survival of the Revolution.

As a remedy, there has been the perception of the European analysis that Raúl was about to test the experimentation of certain alternatives for opening the economy following the Chinese or Vietnamese models. However, the path for reformatting and change was not guaranteed. Nonetheless, European observers already noted that the modest “opening” for a renewed cultural debate was not an isolated event and that it had to be placed in a wider setting of at least testing the waters, as it was confirmed once he took the helm of the State.<sup>7</sup>

### A collective portrait

Overall, the obvious irreplaceable actor in the operation of “constructive engagement” in the setting of the expected Cuban transition is the EU as a collective entity and its most distinguished members, by virtue of their corresponding “special relationships” with Cuba. One has to taken into account that the lack of a clear consensus is not reduced to the presence of one single country with protagonist role (Spain, wishing to move in a direction by reasons of its historical links and political and economic concerns) and the rest that seem not to have a special interest in Cuba, but that individually are noted in specific terrains.

In reality, there is a more ample range of attitudes not reduced to the ones pressuring for the respect of human rights (the Nordic countries and the Netherlands) and the hardliners (East-Central Europeans, led by the Czech Republic and Poland). The picture also includes the “committed” (Spain, Belgium, France, Italy, and Portugal, prioritizing direct contact with government and society) and the Atlanticists (priming the relation with the United States, trying to avoid its damage by an excessive and controversial engagement in Cuba).<sup>8</sup> While the critical Czech attitude and the Polish

<sup>7</sup> For a sample of columns published by the author as a result of the January 2008 visit to Havana:

“Contra Castro vivíamos mejor”, *Correo* (Bilbao), 20 febrero 2008.  
<http://www.elcorreodigital.com/vizcaya/20080220/mundo/contra-castro-viviamos-mejor-20080220.html>;  
 “España y Cuba tras Fidel Castro”, *Cinco Días*, 20 febrero 2008;  
[http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/Espana/Cuba/Fidel/Castro/cdscdi/20080220cdscdiopi\\_4/Tes/](http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/Espana/Cuba/Fidel/Castro/cdscdi/20080220cdscdiopi_4/Tes/);  
 “Cuba y los Estados Unidos: antes y después de Fidel” IPS 080219;  
 “Cuba, España y Estados Unidos tras Fidel”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 20 febrero 2008;  
<http://www.elnuevoherald.com/opinion/story/162667.html>; “Tras la renuncia de Castro”, *Encuentro* 20 febrero 2008 [http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/encuentro-en-la-red/opinion/articulos/tras-la-renuncia-de-castro/\(gnews\)/1203483600](http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/encuentro-en-la-red/opinion/articulos/tras-la-renuncia-de-castro/(gnews)/1203483600); “La nació que deixa Fidel” *Avui*, 1 marzo 2008.  
<http://paper.avui.cat/article/dialeg/118151/la-nacio/deixa/fidel.html>

<sup>8</sup> See: Susanne Gratius, “Cuba: un caso aparte en la política exterior de la Unión Europea”, en Joaquín Roy and Roberto Domínguez, eds. *Las relaciones exteriores de la Unión Europea*, (México: UNAM, 2000), pp. 261-272; IRELA, “Revision of European Policy on Cuba,” pp. 17-21; Susanne Gratius, “¿Es la Posición Común de la UE sobre Cuba una estrategia válida?”, FRIDE, July 2006; “Ayudando a Castro”, *ibid*; y

stance could be considered as a counterweigh for the Spanish position, it is not believed that at the end of the discussions they have a considerable impact in the general consensus.<sup>9</sup>

Taking into account the priority status given to the European contribution to a peaceful transition in Cuba, a fundamental question to be posed is why the relationship between the European countries individually, and the EU collectively, has been conflictive and difficult in recent times, to be converted into a state of “mutual irrelevancy”, as expressed by European officers.<sup>10</sup> In the background of this question an additional query should be inserted: Is Europe important for Cuba? If the answer is moderately affirmative, then to what extent it could be a decisive factor to consider the European suggestions, pressures, invitations, and requirements? In more concrete, national terms, which countries are more “important” for Cuba, in a positive sense (to lure their cooperation) and in negative fashion (to counteract their actions)? Returning to the general context, in what sense it could be stated (or denied) that the European policy towards Cuba is a reaction to the US strategy? It is not easy to find answers to these questions by reviewing the available documentation and the surveys undertaken among the European diplomatic community accredited in Havana. But a series of interviews and the analysis of declarations could provide an approximate collective portrait.

The most salient difficulty in the relationship between Cuba and Europe in recent years is based on the fact that the EU itself has clearly changed since the end of the Cold War and most especially since its enlargement in 2004. In spite of the fact that there has been frequent friction in recent years between Havana and Brussels and several European governments, the attitude of some new EU members towards Cuba has turned to be very conflictive. Two neatly divided camps have been developed regarding the policy to be implemented in future relations. Moreover, the changes in government in some leading members of the EU (the case of Spain) have generated notable tensions that have impacted the general relationship. The Cuban government has taken note and it has forged a monolithic attitude that has left very little margin for the European actions.

In this context, it is obvious that Europe has been and is important for Cuba. But this importance is less than what certain European circles believe. However, it is superior to what the Cuban government frequently would wish to appear when systematically rejecting the conditions emanated from the EU and the demands presented by the hard-line countries. Both bands basically agree that some day they would claim that their policy had contributed to the peaceful transition of Cuba. In spite of the fact that all are basically in agreement to maintain the communication lines open with the Cuban

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Joaquín Roy, “La Unión Europea ante Cuba y Colombia: de buenas intenciones y altas esperanzas a notables contradicciones y grandes frustraciones,” en Roy, Domínguez and Velázquez, *Retos e interrelaciones de la integración regional: Europa y América* (México: Universidad Nacional de Quintana Roo/ Plaza y Valdés, 2003), pp. 153-183; “La Unión Europea ante Cuba y Colombia: de buenas intenciones y altas esperanzas a notables contradicciones y grandes frustraciones,” *América Latina, hoy*. Universidad de Salamanca, Vol. 31, agosto 2002, pp.33-61.

<sup>9</sup>Collective assessment as a result of interviews undertaken in Havana in January of 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Véase Roy, “From stubbornness ...”

government and the civil society, several tendencies differ regarding conditionality in the “constructive engagement”.<sup>11</sup>

The self evaluation of European governments accredited in Havana reveals a ranking of the most important countries (in a positive sense) and the most influential in the maintenance of the hard line attitude towards Cuban policy. Regarding the positive importance and recognition of its peers, post no. 1 corresponds without any discussion and total unanimity to Spain. Even when some European governments maintain a critical stance of the Cuban policy, they admit that if they would have the historical legacy of Spain they would act in a similar way. This Spanish preeminence is followed by Italy, France, Germany and Belgium, and the duo formed by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In the critical band, spot #1 is awarded to the Czech Republic (a true leader of the hard line), followed by Poland and Hungary, countries that have moderated their vision after changes of government. The Netherlands and Sweden are alternatively placed in the group of “positive important” countries and on the side of “negative” because their critical view in the field of human rights.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the permanent lifting of the measures imposed in 2003, as a first step towards the elimination of the Common Position, surveys reinforced by public declarations reveal a wide range of attitudes. At least six “teams” can be detected: (1) the ones that advocate for unconditional lifting; (2) the ones that moderately incite the lifting with certain conditions; (3) the ones inclined to a policy of wait and see in regards to the Cuban moves; (4) the ones that insist in the permanence of a certain conditionality while some degree of modification of the measures is contemplated; and (5) the ones that frontally oppose any move either on the 2003 measures or on the Common Position of 1966, expecting the Cuban government to give unequivocal signals of evolution in the terrain of human rights. A computing of these attitudes sheds a median situated between positions (2) and (3).<sup>13</sup>

The contrast between the Cuban vision (public declarations and personal surveys) and the European regarding the linkage between the policies of Europe towards Cuba, as a reflection of the actions of the United States, is clear. Havana insists that the conditions presented by Brussels to Cuba (Common Position, measures of 2003) are simply a replica of a script issued by Washington, as expressed in the embargo and its codification through the Helms-Burton act and subsequent measures with respect to travel and remittances. Moreover, critical governments inside the EU consider the “constructive dialogue” policy as simply a form of opposing the United States in a scenario without much strategic importance. The European governments acting this would claim to act independently of the United States.<sup>14</sup> In a certain way, this attitude would be similar to the one implemented during the Cold War when they posed the embargo and kept an economic relationship with Cuba and diplomatic link without implying support for a Communist regime. The EU and most European governments consider that the

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<sup>11</sup> Collective portrait as a result of interviews in Havana.

<sup>12</sup> Surveys taken in Havana in January-February 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Surveys undertaken with diplomatic representatives in Havana.

<sup>14</sup> Bases on interviews carried out in Havana in January 2008.

maintenance of the diplomatic link or presenting demands on human rights do not represent a policy of taking cues from Washington.

This picture is not much different than the perception and self evaluation of the different European institutions, mirroring Europe as a whole. On the one hand, the EU Council reflects in its decisions the difficulty of reaching a collective decision, always subject to the threat of veto or pending from the power of persuasion of some leading members. The European Commission, exercising its policy towards Cuba through its development aid branch would reflect the average of the attitude of the governments of the MS. But its inclination towards openness and dialogue, especially when the portfolio is controlled by centrist or liberal commissioners, is frequently the object of the critical MS that complain of the excessive freedom of the executive, without reflecting a consensus derived from the Council.

Finally, there is the activity of the European Parliament, in which there is a majority conservative attitude, expressed in public declarations and documents. However, this numerical superiority to a certain degree is neutralized by the political activism exerted by the Socialist group, which primes the maintenance of the open communication policy with the Cuban government, without sidelining the civil society. This parliamentary balance has been consolidated (even after the retirement of Castro). The overall attitude has not distanced itself from the line coined in the Common Position, based on a dual track of political criticism and the offer of generous aid, conditioned to the respect of human rights.

In sum, this bundle of European attitudes and perceptions on the evolution of the Cuban regime reveals that at no moment the general consensus has abandoned the script of communication, persuasion and pressure towards Cuba. Very well aware of the shortcomings of the regime, its resistance to change and its internal intolerance, Europe seems to send a similar message of the one issued by the millionaire in "Some like it hot": nobody is perfect.

### III

#### Spain

##### A very special relationship

Confirming the common place included in multiple commentaries about the Cuban crisis after Castro's illness and his retirement from power, from a Spanish perspective nothing would be the same afterwards. However, the exception to this general rule may be the relationship between Cuba and Spain. The essence of this link will not suffer notable adjustments, not only after a personal switch in leadership but also after a hypothetical change of regime.

The Spain-Cuba relationship has shown an impressive solidness through more than half a century, in spite of the specific disagreements between their leaders. It is destined to stay in history as a characteristic that some believe to be reserved to the link between the United Kingdom and the United States: a special relationship. The incidents

initiated or provoked by Spanish or Cuban officials did not cause the rupture of relations. The key explanation for this diagnosis is that behind the diplomatic relation there has been always an intimate social communication.<sup>15</sup>

Observers noticed the moderation by which Raúl Castro referred himself to the colonial conflict in his speech of December 2, 2006, given within the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the “Granma” and the delayed 80th birthday of Fidel. Gone was the proposal to build a monument in Santiago de Cuba in honor of the victims of the “genocide” of the colony while the Pope landed in Havana in 1998. Nobody remembers the disdainful reference of Fidel to the date of October 12 (discovery of America and Spain's national day). They were considered as oddities of the moment, of the same tone and superficiality when verbally slapping premier Aznar as “caballerito” and “fuehrer with a little moustache”. Same can be said when Castro called the president of the Spanish Congress during Felipe González's terms, a “fascistic type” and the minister of foreign affairs a “colonial caporal”.<sup>16</sup> More than indignation and diplomatic protests (they were indeed issued), these samples of divertimento provoked kind smiles. In the final analysis, all these verbal skirmishes fit in what what is called as a political variation of the “follón” (quarrel), that would complete the series of expression ending in “on” as persuasion, frustration and irritation, that have presided the Spanish-Cuba relationship.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the frequent incidents since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959, the bases of the Spanish-Cuban relationship remained untouched. This can be attributed to a great extend to the fact that both States felt victims of the US intervention. The intromission exerted by Washington into what was basically a family dispute that was on the way to be resolved by the triumph of the *mambises*, created a political affinity of shared resentment. Cuban sectors that in the 1930s wanted to accelerate the changes of the system were impelled by the same injured sentiment as the Spanish military defeated in '98.

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<sup>15</sup> For a selection of my articles on the relationship between Cuba and Spain, see: “Las relaciones actuales entre Cuba y España”, *Política Exterior*, Vol. I, No. 3 (verano 1987), pp. 282-286; “Las relaciones actuales entre Cuba y España”, *Afers Internacionals* (Barcelona), No. 12-13 (1988), pp. 5-19; “Las relaciones Madrid-La Habana”, *Política Exterior*, Vol. II, 6 (primavera 1988), 275-279; “Cuba: des inconnues pour l'avenir”, *L'Espagne et l'Amérique Latine*, Documentation Française, Paris, No. 595, 11 Nov. 1988, pp. 24-28 ; “Relaciones y percepciones entre España y Cuba. Trasfondo de la 'Crisis de las embajadas' ”, *Cuba 1990: Realidad y futuro*, Carlos Robles Piquer, ed. Santiago de Compostela: Fundación Alfredo Brañas, 1991, pp. 27-47; “España y Cuba: una relación muy especial”. *Revista Afers Internacionals*. (Barcelona), No. 31, 1996, pp. 147-166; “España y Cuba: Una relación muy especial”; “Posdata”; en *El espacio iberoamericano: dimensiones y percepciones de la relación especial entre España y América Latina*. Edición de Joaquín Roy y Juan Antonio March. Miami/Barcelona: Instituto de Estudios Ibéricos/ Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 1996; “Spain and Cuba” and “Postscript,” in *The Ibero-American Space: Dimensions and Perceptions of the Special Relationship Between Spain and Latin America*. Edited with Albert Galinsoga. (Miami/Lleida: Iberian Studies Institute, University of Miami/Jean Monnet Chair, University of Lleida, 1997), pp. 205-265; “La múltiple percepción del papel de España en la transición cubana.” *Actas del I Congreso Europeo de Latinoamericanistas*. Salamanca: University of Salamanca/ Instituto de Iberoamérica y Portugal, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Joaquín Roy, *La siempre fiel: un siglo de relaciones hispanocubanas (1898-1998)*. (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata/ Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación, Universidad Complutense, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Roy, *Cuba*, p. 145.

But he “real Spain” (according to the terminology used by Ortega y Gasset and other Spanish intellectuals) paid no attention to the loss in the war and migrated en mass to Cuba (as Castro’s father did), mixing with the Spanish substrata of colonial times and the more than 200.000 Spanish soldiers (which did include the father of Castro, who was repatriated) who disappeared in Cuba during the wars that led to the *Desastre*.<sup>18</sup> The ‘98 trauma was permanently enshrined in a popular expression, still in use today: “Más se perdió en Cuba” (more was lost in Cuba) it is said as a justification and relative value of a personal loss. It is for this reason that the “official Spain” recognized the “official Cuba” in spite of the changes in governments in both countries.<sup>19</sup> The end of the María Cristina regency, the turbulent monarchy of Alfonso XIII, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the Second Spanish Republic, the Civil War and the Franco regime did not break the relationship with the successive Cuban governments and regimes, from the US occupation until the current chapter of the revolutionary system,.

The encomiastic treatment bestowed by Castro on Franco contrasts with the coolness expressed by Socialist primer minister Felipe González and the belligerent attitude professed by Aznar.<sup>20</sup> Fidel interpreted that the Spanish *caudillo* maintained the link with Cuba as dignity gesture in front of Washington. In reality, Franco (advised by his diplomats, who worked diligently for the survival of the regime) did it in order to give himself a touch of liberalism in the Latin American context, and in this way avoiding a domino effect of the Mexican diplomatic break, a model much feared by the *franquismo* in the Latin American setting where Madrid implemented a “foreign policy of substitution” to make up for the shortcomings of an effective policy in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.<sup>21</sup>

For the above reasons, when Spanish ambassador Juan Pablo de Lojendio rushed to the TV Havana studios one night of January 1960 and called (live) Castro’s accusation against the Spanish embassy a lie, upon returning expelled to Madrid, Franco marginalized him for months. “With Cuba, anything except to break”, he said, quoted by his cousin in one-of-a-kind memoirs.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that between 1960 and 1974, with diplomatic relations maintained at the level of chargé d’affaires, when the Spanish-Cuban link showed to be as solid as ever, even though the Spanish migration had ceased and many emigrants were returning to Spain, disillusioned with the Revolution.

The second *test* of the resistance of the linkage became obvious when in the following decade and a half the newly born Spanish democracy coexisted with the second period of the Cuban-Soviet alliance. It was feared that the historical and cultural legacy

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<sup>18</sup> Manuel Moreno Fragnals, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1995), pp. 228-292.

<sup>19</sup> Roy, *La siempre fiel*, ch. II.

<sup>20</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: biografía a dos voces* (Madrid: Debate, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See the followings works by Manuel de Paz Sánchez: *Zona Rebelde: la diplomacia española ante la Revolución Cubana (1957-1960)* (Tenerife: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 1997), pp. 301-317; “Franco y Cuba”, ponencia presentada en el Coloquio Internacional de la Universidad de Nantes, 7-9 diciembre 2006; and *Franco y Cuba: Estudios sobre España y la Revolución* (Tenerife: Idea, 2006), cap. 5, pp. 187-300, and cap. 6, pp. 301-375.

<sup>22</sup> Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mis conversaciones privadas con Franco* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1976).

of Spain would disappear under an educational system following the model of Eastern Europe.<sup>23</sup>

The tenacity exercised by the successive Spanish governments since 1976 have reinforced the link with the “official Cuba”, as an effort to ameliorate the gradual disappearance of the immigratory “real Spain”. This established “policy of State” has made the miracle of continuation, which not even the attitude of the “official Spain” led by Aznar was strong enough to provoke the end of diplomatic relations after the reaction of the “official Cuba” in 2003 when the imposition of the measures brought the Spanish/European relationship to the brink. Only when the “real Cuba” can freely express its opinion, it will be seen if the policy of “constructive engagement” was efficient.

In general terms, over the recent years the most decisive measures taken by the EU institutions reflect, in one way or another, the impact of the actions taken by the Spanish government or the representation of its leading parties. When, for example, the Popular Party (P), led by José María Aznar, took over the helm of the Spanish government, the call in Brussels was to approve the Common Position on Cuba in 1996. In turn, when the PSOE recovered power, then the general script changed in the direction proposed. Most of the partners in the EU follow the lead, constructing a consensus. Resolutions taken by the European Parliament frequently reflect the imprint of the conservative majority led by the PP.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of its role in the 2005 lifting of the special measures imposed in 2003, the Spanish diplomatic representation in Cuba still suffered a mixed treatment by the Cuban authorities.<sup>25</sup> Internally, the Spanish government has been consistently harassed by the Popular Party in the domestic context, its favorable media, and in international forums such as the EU institutions, especially the Parliament. PP representatives and critics of the Spanish Socialist Part (PSOE) policy towards Cuba have frequently visited Washington (Aznar,<sup>26</sup> most prominently) and Miami, making declarations and giving interviews to receptive audiences and media.<sup>27</sup> The consensus that existed in the 80’s and 90’s between the two major Spanish parties was terminated once the policy towards Cuban became to be one of confrontation after the arrival of José María Aznar to power, with the result that diplomatic relations between Madrid and Havana were reduced to a minimum.

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<sup>23</sup> Roy, *Cuba y España*.

<sup>24</sup> From EU sources in Brussels and Madrid (June 2007).

<sup>25</sup> ATB. “Cuba.-IU-ICV critica que el representante de España en la Cumbre de los No Alienados se reuniese con disidentes cubanos”. 22 septiembre 2006; Mauricio Vicent. “Cuba rebaja la presencia oficial en la fiesta nacional celebrada en la embajada española”. *El País*, 14 octubre 2006; ATB. “Cuba.-España “refuerza” los contactos con miembros del Gobierno y la disidencia ante la situación de Fidel Castro”. *El País*, 15 octubre 2006.

<sup>26</sup> See also his participation in the Heritage Foundation conference held in Philadelphia: Cristina Ozaeta, EFE, “Rechaza Aznar ‘sucesión en la tiranía para Cuba’”, *Diario las Américas*, 29 abril 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Ariel Remos, “Ofrece PP español alternativa de centro liberal y reformista”, *Diario las Américas*, 24 abril 2007.

While the PSOE never questioned (and even endorsed it) the PP-sponsored award of EU honors to Cuban dissidents and contributed to make the Brussels-Havana link minimally effective, the stalemate created by the temporary imposition of measures in 2003 convinced the new Spanish government that they were counterproductive. Lack of effective communication between European governments and Cuban authorities were the norm, while the living conditions of the dissidents remained the same. Hence, the change of EU policy in early 2005 was executed without a fight from the minority that opposed the consensus. However, the expected substantial changes were not produced and then the crisis of the Castro's illness put the relationship on hold. But Spain seemed to be destined not to disappear from the scene.

### From prudence to bold action

Since the crisis produced by Fidel Castro's illness exploded and the temporary and limited cession of power was announced, most predictions regarding a new European (and specially Spain's) strategy towards Cuba were fulfilled. The expert and governmental recommendations that were then issued had been accepted with a certain degree of resignation and a sense of wisdom.

The institutional machinery of the EU and leading MS (by their historical legacy and other influence-making factors) in the policy towards Cuba, reaffirmed a cautious attitude. Innovative political and economic frameworks were frozen since Raúl Castro took over the conditioned control of government. In spite of the array of events and incidents outlined above, life seemed to be business as usual. The only difference was that Fidel was not officially on the scene, occupying center stage, as he had done for 47 years. All things considered, that was not the right time for risky movements. In consequence, Europe considered during that time that the circumstances were not the most propitious to execute a considerable gear shift either in the explicit general policy, or in the individual lines of action.

On the one hand, the European foreign offices opted for taking into account the subtle language emanating from Havana and for responding to the apparent "normalcy" presented by the temporary transfer of power with a nod and an intention for waiting. On the other hand, the prevailing consensus (difficult and arduous in its precarious existing state) confirmed the need for not changing the situation in the middle of 2006, before the illness of Fidel Castro. But the impasse produced a spillover effect well in 2007.

The two most explicit signals made by the EU to Cuba had been the lack of action and an intention of change in the policy. On the one hand, the promised drafting of a "strategy" (a word that has gradually disappeared from the EU vocabulary) towards Cuba, as prescribed by the Council in 2006, a document that should have been available just after the summer, became frozen.<sup>28</sup> Waiting for better perspectives, the actors equipped with stronger influence (Spain in the lead) were energetically opposed to the codification (another potential "common position"). This would have made more difficult the necessary maneuvering flexibility to act according to the unforeseeable circumstances

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<sup>28</sup> See Roy, "From stubbornness"

that are arisen, in addition of giving the Cuban regime a new excuse for suffering harassment in the U.S. style.

In addition, the only other explicit declaration has been the semester renovation of the lifting of the “special and transitory measures” imposed as a reprisal for the serious incidents (imprisonment of 75 dissidents and execution of three hijackers), eliminated (but still subject to an annual evaluation) at the beginning of 2005.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the official attitude of the EU continued practically to be the same as enshrined in the Common Position of 1996, reduced to the conditionality of a cooperation agreement with the collective EU, subject to a political and economic reform, and a criticism of the human rights situation.

Several factors contributed to this activity (or lack of it). One is derived from the lack of substantial changes in the overall political shape of the Cuban regime. In the first place, subtle and explicit signals emanated from the Cuban government in the sense that notable changes were not expected, while Fidel Castro continued to make his presence felt in indirect media appearances, reinforcing the perception that he was recovering. This provisionality would only be clarified with his death, full return to power, or his eventual “retirement”. Second, the pacts arranged by Cuba with other actors (Venezuela) indicate that Havana does not have an urgency to obtain additional support or favors.

The European perception, in consequence, coincides in this aspect with the rest of the international analytical community, including the political and intelligence circles of the United States, that have demonstrated during this period a lack of fresh ideas in dealing with the unforeseeable events in Cuba. When Washington does not explore more innovative avenues, why should the Europeans, at least their most influential circles of power, take the risk of damaging the cautionary attitude during this long period of “constructive engagement”? Without a precise alternative, beyond the insistence in provoking a drastic and instantaneous change that not does seem to be in the horizon, what options were to follow? There were not many, for the benefit of Spanish interests.

The issue then was to detect the exact motivation for a subtle change of course or a drastic shift in the policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain made the decision to reestablish full communication with the Cuban government through the public signing of an accord in the fields of economics, investment, and a political dialogue including human rights.<sup>30</sup> As an immediate result, commentaries ranged from silence and prudence

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<sup>29</sup> For details, see Roy, “From stubbornness”.

<sup>30</sup> EFE. “Cooperación y Derechos Humanos entre temas agenda visita Moratinos”. 1 abril, 2007; Luis Ayllón. “España prepara su posición en una Cuba llena de incertidumbre”. *ABC*, 23 marzo 2007; Mauricio Vicent. “Moratinos intenta asegurar en Cuba el papel de España ante el cambio”. *El País*, 1 mayo 2007; EFE. “Visita de Moratinos a Cuba”. *Diario las Américas*, 1 abril 2007; Mauricio Vicent. “En este momento delicado Cuba necesita diálogo, no presión”. *El País*, 1 mayo 2007; Roberto Díaz. “Canciller español inicia visita a la Habana”. *El Nuevo Herald*, 2 abril 2007; Roberto Díaz. “Moratinos llegó a Cuba en la primavera visita de un canciller de la UE desde el 2003”. *Diario las Américas*, 3 abril 2007; Mauricio Vicent. “Moratinos anuncia en La Habana el inicio de una “nueva etapa” de entendimiento con Cuba”. *El País*, 3 mayo 2007; *Granma*. “Cuba y España inician nueva etapa de diálogo firme y abierto”, 3 mayo 2007; Andrea Rodríguez. “Spain, Cuba aim for better relations”. *The Miami Herald*, 4 abril 2007; EFE. “Moratinos optimista tras encuentro con Raúl Castro”. *Diario las Américas*, 5 abril 2007.

to overt criticism and finger pointing on the motivations behind.<sup>31</sup> Remorse came mainly from the dissident community that felt humiliated by the refusal of Moratinos to meet with the dissidents during the visit (leaving, as an alternative, the scheduling of interviews with a lower level representation).<sup>32</sup> Commentators close to the views of the Spanish Popular Party expressed similar critical evaluation.<sup>33</sup> Media analysts questioned the future effective impact of the move.<sup>34</sup> Voices in the exile sectors pointed out that the move had an explanation predominantly economic,<sup>35</sup> –Spain was tendering to its investments, seeking protection for current operations and expecting devolution or compensation for past terminated partnerships.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, the frustration over the visit of Moratinos and the lack of a scheduled interview with the dissidents prompted some of these groups to sign a commitment of unity, although they denied the link between the visit and their decision.<sup>37</sup>

The Spanish move also gave a new base for the Spanish political opposition to attack the foreign policy of Premier Rodríguez Zapatero.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the measure generated protests from Spanish commentators usually situated on the moderate left, producing critical editorials from the normally favorable press, most especially the Madrid daily *El País*.<sup>39</sup> This influential newspaper awarded its Ortega y Gasset Prize to

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<sup>31</sup> *Diario las Américas*. “Crítica el exilio visita de Moratinos a Cuba”. 5 abril 2007; Agence France Presse. “La disidencia frustrada tras visita de Moratinos”. *El Nuevo Herald*, 5 abril 2007; Andrew Rettman. “Spain keen to bury EU pro-democracy ideas on Cuba”. *EU Observer*, 4 April, 2007; Luis Ayllón. “Moratinos logra un vago compromiso de Cuba sobre derechos humanos”. *ABC*, 4 mayo 2007.

<sup>32</sup> EFE. “Embajada española lamenta ausencia de disidentes cubanos”. *Diario las Américas*, 6 abril 2007; Agence France Presse. “La disidencia frustrada tras visita de Moratinos”. *El Nuevo Herald*, 5 abril 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Soeren Kern, “Spanish Foreign Policy Hits Rocks Over Cuba”, Strategic Study Group, July 17, 2007

<sup>34</sup> Andrés Oppenheimer, “Spain's new opening to Cuba a risky gambit”, *The Miami Herald*, July 16, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> The delay in Cuban payments for trade activities is notorious, with the result of frequent critical references in the Spanish press. An example: Luis Losada Pescador, “Fidel Castro no paga las facturas”, *Epoca*, 8-12 abril 2007.

<sup>36</sup> *Diario las Américas*. “Crítica el exilio visita de Moratinos a Cuba”. 5 abril 2007. Andrés Reynaldo. “Mano a mano”. *El Nuevo Herald*, 6 abril 2007; Pablo Alfonso. “España estrena en Cuba diplomacia del arrepentimiento”. *Diario las Américas*, 4 abril 2007.

<sup>37</sup> EFE, “La disidencia firma la declaración de unidad”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 16 abril 2007; EFE, “EEUU pide que Moratinos diga por qué no se reunió”, *Diario las Américas*, 15 abril 2007; AP, “Cuban dissident groups issue message of unity”, *The Miami Herald*, April 18, 2007; EFE, “Organizaciones del exilio apoyan unidad de la disidencia interna de cuba”, *Diario las Américas*, 18 abril 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Antonio Rodríguez. “Aznar arremete contra la política hacia Cuba del gobierno español” *Diario las Américas*, 12 abril 2007; EFE, “PP: sólo se justifica si consigue liberación de presos políticos”. *Diario las Américas*, 30 marzo 2007; Luis Ayllón. “España prepara su posición en una Cuba llena de incertidumbre”. *ABC*, 23 marzo 2007.

<sup>39</sup> *El País*. “Cuba prohibida”. 11 abril 2007; Amaya López Núñez. “Un test para la política exterior”. *El País*, 9 abril 2007; Maria Dolores Masana. “Los 24 de Cuba”. *El País*, 12 abril 2007; Antonio Elorza, “España/Cuba: antidemocracia”. *El País*, 14 abril 2007; Rosa Montero, “Victimas”. *El País*, 10 abril 2007; Pilar Rahola. “Cuba, triste asignatura pendiente”. *El País*, 6 mayo 2007.

exile dissident Raúl Rivero, who was liberated in 2005 thanks to the role played by the Spanish government.<sup>40</sup> When the Popular Party presented a motion in Congress asking the Spanish government to demand from the Cuban authorities the release of 134 political prisoners,<sup>41</sup> the Minister of Foreign Affairs answered that the dialogue strategy would be the most effective and expressed commitment towards the dissidents.<sup>42</sup> Elena Valenciano, PSOE's secretary for International Relations insisted that the Spanish government has specifically mentioned what is expected from the Cuban authorities regarding the prisoners, reminding critics that in the past Spain did not have a leverage position and did not obtain any results.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the Spanish move raised questions from the U.S. government,<sup>44</sup> alluding to a lack of consultation,<sup>45</sup> which were replied to by the Spanish government with terse and blunt statements. Significantly, Spain's partners in the EU did not produce public announcements, while the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to keep the lines of communication open with Cuba, even though Havana confirmed its rejection of collective cooperation.<sup>46</sup> The EU-U.S. summit held in Washington included a brief reference of support to the Cuban people and human rights.<sup>47</sup>

However, keener analysts reminded the drafters of simplistic explanations based solely on trade and investment arguments that the Cuban operations are in fact of minor relative importance for the Spanish economy as a whole. There is also very little political return, in terms of a considerable shifting of vote towards the PSOE from the business sector of majoritarian inclination for the PP. In spite of the public acrimony over the Cuban issue, its actual impact in the election results is insignificant. Indecisive voters (the ones tipping the scale) are motivated by unemployment, the cost of living and housing, education, immigration and ETA terrorism, not by attitudes towards Cuba. This sensible argument is mirrored by the fact that U.S. policy toward Cuba is not driven by the desire

<sup>40</sup> AP, "Exile Cuban journalist honored", *The Miami Herald*, April 28, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> The reason for this precise number is unknown, because reliable calculations raise the figure to over 270.

<sup>42</sup> EFE, "PP español pide exigir a Cuba libertad de 134 presos políticos", *Diario las Américas*, 1 mayo 2007.

<sup>43</sup> EFE, "Dirigente socialista dice Gobierno mantendrá el diálogo con los disidentes", 2 mayo 2007.

<sup>44</sup> EFE, "Funcionaria de EEUU pide explicación a Moratinos" *El Nuevo Herald*, 17 abril 2007. EFE, "EEUU pide que Moratinos diga por qué no se reunió", *Diario las Américas*, 15 abril 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Antonio Caño, "Estados Unidos critica el viaje del ministro español a La Habana". *El País*, 14 abril 2007; Antonio Caño, "Estados Unidos critica el viaje del ministro español a La Habana". *El País*, 14 abril 2007; EFE, "Moratinos dice que informó a EEUU de su viaje a Cuba 'antes, durante y después' " *Diario las Américas*", 19 abril 2007; A.M-F "Moratinos dice que no tiene por qué explicar a EE.UU. su viaje", *ABC*, 18 abril 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Andreu Missé. "Bruselas afirma que la visita no contradice UE". *El País*, 3 mayo 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Declaration, May 1, 2007. AFP, "Aluden a Cuba en cumbre EEUU y UE", *El Nuevo Herald*, 1 mayo 2007.

to recover property.<sup>48</sup> There must be a more credible motivation –the feeling that Spain was loosing ground in Cuba, where its presence has been felt for half of millennium. To maintain this existence in a scenario where the only change may come from within, the only alternative is to stay put, as the United States does with any other country, with the exception of Cuba.

So, Spain was left with the unnerving prospect of subjecting its policy to a never ending (in view of the standing impasse of the Cuban regime) annual review (it used to be on a semester basis before 2005) of the EU's Cuba policy, with the Czech Republic and other governments, "cheering on by U.S.-supported groups operating in Europe, pressing for a common posture that would result in diplomacy similar to that practiced by the U.S. Interests Section in Havana." That is, "a diplomacy based on extensive contacts with dissidents and scarce contact with officials, academics, and others who are not formally part of the opposition." Rational logic then must consider that "given all that, it is little wonder that Madrid decided to set its own course and not to subordinate its diplomatic strategy to a Euro-debate twice a year."<sup>49</sup>

Spain then decided to lead the pack of those who, for lack of means or influence, consider that the best strategy to exploit the holes and windows of opportunity that the Cuban system permits. The "bilateralization" method has then prevailed over the precarious "multilaterality". For these reasons, the diverse lines of culture, development cooperation and the political dialogue with governmental Cuba are to be seen as the columns that maintain the communication with the "civic society" of Cuba, if there is such an entity. This strategy will ultimately be endorsed, at least tacitly, by responsible partners. The claims made by other actors with no alternative arguments will fade away.

This attitude is not exempt of risks, because fast and tangible results are demanded. However, it has to be taken into account that Spanish and European expectations and strategy are geared towards the medium term future, when the peaceful and reconciliatory transition is produced. In order to contribute to this scenario, the Spanish analysis came to the conclusion that one has to be present directly on the scene.

An extreme realist view in EU and Spanish circles has evaluated this strategy as an apparent message of accepting to pay any price for maintaining an open communication line with the Cuban government. At the same time, this approach attempts to be present in wide sectors of the economy and culture (possible reopening of the Spanish cultural center, closed down by Castro in 2003). Although this may not be that important, considering the low ranking enjoyed by Cuban issues in the EU institutions, some loss of confidence might be the result of the Spanish move in Havana. It is estimated that the final report card given by the rest of the Member States (especially the most critical and skeptic) will depend on how many dissidents imprisoned will be liberated in the coming months. In other words, Spain may have been placed in a dependency status –it is up to the Cuban regime to respond and evaluate how important is a new relationship before offering some concessions. In the metaphorical expression of EU insiders, the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs took a direct dive in the Cuban

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<sup>48</sup> Phil Peters, "Eight months and counting", *Cuba Policy Report*, April 17, 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Peters, *ibid.*

swimming pool... that it was half empty. Then, the Cuban government may or may not provide the necessary water.<sup>50</sup>

Last, but not least, an additional factor must be considered in the context of the Spanish decision. Although Spanish officials would deny it, it is conceivable that the intelligence services of Spain—one of the best in Cuban affairs—, and private sources, such as medical services, must have known of the contradictions and high expectations regarding the apparent important improvement in Castro’s health, as it was exposed in the last part of April 2007 when he appeared in the company of Chinese officials.<sup>51</sup> Speculation then centered on the resumption of some of his duties. This improvement in the capacity of Castro to keep a better control over the political machinery of Cuba might have dictated the logic of the Spanish move to deal with a prolonged transition or the absence of it.<sup>52</sup> U.S. sources remained skeptical.<sup>53</sup> However, the expectations raised by predictions (most especially by Bolivian President Evo Morales) that Castro would reappear in public and resume power on May 1 turned out to be disappointing. He did not attend the celebration at the Plaza de la Revolución, limiting his exposure to publishing one of his columns in *Granma*.<sup>54</sup> No reference was made to his health, declared a “state secret” by the government, since the announcement of his illness in August 2006.<sup>55</sup> Castro’s absence prompted comments regarding his weak condition, taken into account the importance of the occasion.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile, the balance of the mild economic reforms that were optimistically expected and apparently implemented by the temporary tenure of Raúl Castro were either not confirmed or the plans were eliminated.<sup>57</sup> In sum, the prospects of a continuation of the stalemate or a situation of “business as usual” made the alternative of not making any moves a dubious proposition. This negative assessment was later changed when after Fidel’s retirement, his brother started to execute some economic and social changes, branded as important by the regime, welcome but insufficient by the general population, and cosmetic by the U.S. government.

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<sup>50</sup> EU sources.

<sup>51</sup> *Granma*, “Reciben Fidel y Raúl a delegación china de alto nivel” 21 abril 2007.

<sup>52</sup> EFE, “Preparan actos por el primero de Mayo”, *Diario las Américas*, 29 abril 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Pablo Bachelet, “U.S. doubts full recovery”, *The Miami Herald*, April 25, 2007

<sup>54</sup> “It is imperative to immediately have an energy revolution”, *Granma*, 1 mayo 2007. <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/2007/ing/f010507i.html>. Previous articles: “Respuesta brutal”. Reflexiones del Comandante en Jefe, 10 de abril del 2007; “La internacionalización del genocidio”, 3 de abril del 2007; “Condenados a muerte prematura por hambre y sed más de 3 mil millones de personas en el mundo.” 28 de marzo del 2007.

<sup>55</sup> EFE, “Raúl Castro, y no Fidel” preside las celebraciones”, *El País*, 1 mayo 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Mar Marín, EFE, “Castro ausente”, *Diario las Américas*, 2 mayo 2007; Andrés Oppenheimer, “May Day absence means Castro may be more ill than we thought”, *The Miami Herald*, May 2, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Frances Robles, “Raúl’s reforms put on hold”, *The Miami Herald*, May 2, 2007.

## IV

### An uncertain scenario

#### From opening to the unknown

Until Castro's resignation, there was very little ground to envision what kind of alternatives Raúl then might devise. In the view of European speculation, two important dimensions were worth consideration, both connected with the role of military. On the one hand, European interests have been also eager to inspect what kind of new role nationalism will play in that period.<sup>58</sup> On the other, attention has been given to the sense of professionalism that the Revolutionary Armed Forces claim to have and to what degree they will be willing and able to perform once the full succession takes place.<sup>59</sup> In this scenario, the enigma in a first stage of the opening of the system there is centered on the return of the limited private initiative experiments in the first part of the 90s. How this would be connected to a further incentive for a renewed and more aggressive European investment is a variable which outcome is difficult and cumbersome to evaluate.

The impact of a decisive opening of the economic and political system as a result of an effective transition (not a simple succession as it happened) is a panorama that is open to a high level of uncertainty. A more than realistic (pessimistic, for some) evaluation of the European chances considers that the limited economic investment made in Cuba, added to the special historical interests of some members (Spain), will not be able to confront the invasion of U.S. involvement. During the first transitional stages under the cover of a modest economic opening, European investment would have a comparative advantage over the U.S. financial energy. But the risk for medium and small European enterprises, once the system becomes wide competitive, will be impressive. That is why numerous European voices have been pressing for the preparation of a common strategy to confront any novelty presented by the new situation.

A third scenario resulting from a difficult and confrontational succession (although this presents a low probability in the European calculations) is a climate of in fighting between factions within the Armed Forces, while a part of the population tries to settle old accounts and attempts to capture sectors of political and economic influence. With no plan known as to what the U.S. government may do, diverse European governments might design an exit strategy for families and non-essential personnel, using the varied means available. Among them is the geographical closeness of European

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<sup>58</sup> Rafael Rojas, "Ideología, cultura y memoria. Dilemas simbólicos de la transición", in Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *Cuba en el siglo XXI: ensayos sobre la transición*, (Madrid: Colibrí, 2006), pp. 289-304.

<sup>59</sup> For a useful analysis in this line, see: Jorge Domínguez, "Las relaciones entre civiles y militares en Cuba desde una perspectiva comparada: hacia un régimen democrático", Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *Cuba en el siglo XXI: ensayos sobre la transición*, (Madrid: Colibrí, 2006), 67-94. See also the análisis by Luis Esteban G. Manrique, "Cuba: segunda parte: la etapa castrense del castrismo", *Política Exterior*, no. 123, mayo-junio 2009.

sovereign, colonial, or semi colonial territories in the Caribbean (France, UK, Netherlands) and an increase of the air connections maintained by several national carriers (Spain, France, Britain). Unless a considerable maritime lift is implemented, there are no clear resources to accommodate a trans-Atlantic sudden migration of European nationals.

In any event, a scenario such as this would also represent a sorry failure of the efforts made during the last two decades by the European involvement to facilitate a peaceful transition. Nonetheless, this violent outcome would be beyond the reach of the capability of European resources and calculations. EU's efforts were never designed to influence any given scenario, but to facilitate the most positive background and context that would avoid this type of negative environment.

In Brussels and influential European ministries of foreign affairs it has been believed that a possible lifting of some of the codified conditions of the embargo could come from a combination of two other factors. On the one hand, it is already very difficult to sustain the pressure of U.S. commercial interests that do not want to miss the opportunity of selling food and medicines to Cuba, a sector that has made the United States the second most important trade partner. On the other hand, the hardliners of the Cuban exile community have been lobbying to maintain its influence to oppose the lifting of the embargo as such, without an explicit compensation from the Cuban regime. However, at the same time, this sector, in an alliance with the future White House and certain members of Congress, will not be able to maintain indefinitely the limitations imposed on the remittances to families and visits to Cuba, a recent policy implemented by the U.S. government that has a sole victims the sectors with limited income in the exile community and the families left behind.

Regarding the embargo, while the EU opposition is based on principles and the defense of its own interests threatened by the extraterritorial codifying laws (CDA and Helms-Burton), the steady European message is that it only benefits the Cuban regime, reinforcing its political excuse for the shortcomings of the system. The inertia in maintaining the embargo for historical reasons and the rationale that its unconditional lifting after 45 years would be a victory for Raúl, are not arguments worthy of counteracting the negative balance of its empirical failure in obtaining its principal goal – the sudden collapse of the regime. In the Brussels analysis, there is a fragrant contradiction in stating that the U.S.-Cuba bad relationship (embargo included) is not international, but a domestic issue (Florida electoral clout), while at the same time in claiming not to speak for the U.S. government, and ultimately demanding to deal directly with Cuba's population, leaving them the monopoly of initiative.

This argument sidelines the fact that the codification of the embargo, by taking away the executive U.S. presidential power and giving it to Congress, was a direct result of the impressive lobbying of Cuban exile influential groups.<sup>60</sup> If it is true that the U.S. policy towards Cuba depends on domestic issues, this dependency does not seem to be translated by the current frustration that Washington's policy does not speak for the exiles.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For a recent analysis of this issue, see: Patrick J. Haney and Walt Vanderbush, *The Cuban embargo: the domestic politics of American foreign policy*. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005)

<sup>61</sup> From interviews held in Miami with the leadership of several exile organizations (February-April 2007).

Reflecting on the banning of official EU's aid in Cuba, under the claim that it mirrors the "imperialistic" intromission practiced by the United States, Brussels insiders share with Cuban exiles the need not to connect (at least publicly) the aid resources intended for the dissidents with the official policy of the United States. That connection itself serves the Cuban regime to discredit the movement as taking cues from Washington. Official plans designed for a transition in Cuba only adds more fuel to the fire, raising fears in the majority of the population exclusively engaged in "resolver" its daily survival.

Brussels has noticed with keen interest that some of the ingredients of the European "constructive engagement" are present in the new attitude of exile groups that in the past were considered as "fundamentalist" in facing the Cuban regime. For example, EU observers take note of the opposition recently expressed by the Cuban American National Foundation to the limitations imposed by the U.S. government on the level and periodicity of remittances channeled by Cuban exiles to relatives in Cuba.<sup>62</sup> This kind of people-to-people engagement is the most productive way of a direct relationship that accomplishes a lessening of the hardships endured by a sector of the Cuban population with considerable spill over effects, touching not only the immediate family as beneficiaries but also others. The fact that this position contrasts with the official policy of the U.S. government may result in a much better attitude professed by the Cuban government.

#### An expected new EU disappointment?

When the end of the first semester of the European Union calendar was approaching in June of 2007, a fraction of the EU establishment paid attention to a topic that comparatively could not compete with the daunting task faced by the German presidency for crafting a compromise to rescue the basics aspects of the failed constitutional treaty. Cuba has never been a major issue for the EU and has never crossed the border of creating notable difficulties with the exception of the polemic created by the passing and potential implementation of the Helms-Burton law in 1995. Nonetheless, as we have seen above, the evolution of the Cuban regime after the announcement of the Castro's illness has occupied the attention of major actors in the EU setting and has generated considerable polemics. The pending business of the temporary measures taken against Cuba in 2003, provisionally lifted in 2005, and the standing validity of the Common Position approved in 1996, became the center pieces of the decisions to be made at the closing of the semester. Not to the full satisfaction of all parties involved, a new compromise was reached with the result of the expected continuation of a stalemate and ambiguity in the relations between the EU en Cuba.

First, expectations were high over the prospects of a permanent lifting of the measures approved in 2003, as retaliation for the serious incidents that took place in Cuba (imprisonment of 75 dissidents and the execution of three highjackers). Spain and other member states were pressuring for the permanent suspension on the grounds that were in

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<sup>62</sup> From interviews held in Miami (March 2007).

fact not implemented and they had become a cause of irritation for the Cuban regime.<sup>63</sup> Opposing members and sectors of the dissident movement were advocating for the re-imposition of the measures.<sup>64</sup> The confrontation was also set in the context of the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Madrid, where she raised the U.S. opposition to the Spanish engagement in Cuba. Spanish authorities politely responded that Spain had the right to conduct its own foreign policy, especially with Cuba, and that the confrontation between the United States and Cuba was a thing of the past.<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, the EU Council decided to uphold the suspension of the measures, without making any move towards their permanent dissolution. The compromise reached (thanks to an unprecedented deal made by the Spanish and the Czech governments, labeled by insiders as a lesson for future compromises) and included the avoidance of mentioning the said measures. This rather unexpected (in comparative historical terms) consensus between Madrid and Prague, considering the standing colliding arguments of both governments, was so strong that the document composed by the German presidency could at any time resist requests from delegations. Consequently, it was adopted without a change, since its main protagonists (Spain and the Czech Republic) warned that the slightest modification could run the risk of not producing any text. It should be noted that the EU Council context is very complex, with at least three distinct groups regarding their attitude towards Cuba: the hardliners, centered, and the moderates. The Czechs have been recently playing the role of “good cop”, neutralizing the radical approach expressed by the Polish, with the results that Prague becomes an ally of Madrid. The Cuban representatives in Brussels know very well who their real enemies and “friends” are, and act accordingly, without making it clear in public declarations –the only official discourse is the script given by Havana.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, the thorny topic of the Common Position suffered same treatment. The document that was drafted included the customary serious demands made by the EU for Cuban political and economic reform, calling for the liberation of political prisoners.<sup>67</sup> In closing, the EU offered the Cuban government to send a special delegation to Brussels to discuss all matters of mutual concern.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the Spanish government

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<sup>63</sup> EFE, “Europa estudia eliminar sanciones”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 9 junio 2007.

<sup>64</sup> EFE, “Piden a Europa que restablezca sanciones”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 8 junio 2007.

<sup>65</sup> *Debate 21*, “De la Vega dice que Estados Unidos tiene que comprender”, 5 junio 2007.

<sup>66</sup> From EU circles and EU member states sources.

<sup>67</sup> Council of the European Union, EU Policy on Cuba, 15 June 2007.

<sup>68</sup> EFE, “UE mantendrá su actual política hacia Cuba”, 14 junio 2007; Beatriz Navarro, “La UE tiende la mano a la Cuba de Fidel Castro”, *La Vanguardia*, 19 junio 2007; Luis Ayllón, “España da un año de plazo a Cuba para que responda a la política de diálogo”, *ABC*, 17 junio 2007; AP, “Europa invita a Cuba”, 16 junio 2007; Ricardo Martínez de Rituerto, “la UE invita a Cuba a discusiones políticas y sobre derechos humanos”, *El País*, 15 junio 2007; Pablo Bachelet, “European sanctions against Cuba upheld”, *The Miami Herald*, June 15, 2007.

invited the Cuban dissident community residents in Madrid to a meeting for explaining the current policy.<sup>69</sup>

The complex background of the deal included the difficult consensus to avoid any reference to a re-evaluation of the controversial Common Position set in 1996. However, it had to include a call for the Cuban government to release unconditionally all political prisoners, an offer of support to the Cuban civil society towards peaceful change, and finally the confirmation of the EU invitation to Cuba to send a high-level delegation to Brussels to resume a comprehensive dialogue, including the conflictive topic of human rights. Nonetheless, important disagreements over the policy towards Cuba persist regarding the measures taken in 2003. Despite intensive discussions, it was not possible to reach an agreement on the state of the pending 17th re-evaluation of the Common Position, with a possible lifting of said measures. There was also no agreement in including an explicit reference to the continued suspension. By re-evaluating the Common Position without mentioning the measures meant, according to legal calculations, that they were in fact enforced, something that a majority of states opposed. That is the reason why the text does not make any reference to a re-evaluation. It is a skilful way to circumvent troubles. The final consensus then implied that the Common Position is still valid, but that the conclusions are not to be considered as a re-evaluation of the Common Position. The agreement also means that the 2003 measures remain suspended. In the event that the Cuban authorities do not accept the invitation to officially meet, the pending 17th re-evaluation of the Common Position has been scheduled to be executed in June of 2008.<sup>70</sup>

Bearing in mind that member states would have certain difficulties in explaining this elaborate, cumbersome compromise, the EU officials advanced some points to be addressed to media and other actors. To start with, government officers are advised to bear in mind that the consensus was a successful serious initial agreement. The EU would strengthen its future position by showing a sign of unity. It would lose leverage if showing inside fighting. A reopening of the complex text meant the risk of destroying the agreement. With the invitation of the EU to meet with the Cuban government, the ball was in Cuba's court.<sup>71</sup>

Most media observers in Spain greeted the solution as the best among the possible outcomes, given the circumstances.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the compromise did not meet the expectations of the dissidents and sectors of the Cuban exile community. The Cuban government reaction was first a cool silence. It was followed by a declaration laced with animosity and visible irritation.<sup>73</sup> The crowning to this was in the form of a column published by Fidel Castro in his series of articles in the newspaper Granma.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> EFE, *La Vanguardia*, "Exteriores convoca a la disidencia cubana", 17 junio 2007.

<sup>70</sup> From EU Council reports and documentation.

<sup>71</sup> From EU reports and documents.

<sup>72</sup> *La Vanguardia*, "Cuba, España y la UE", 21 junio 2007; *El País*, "Diálogo con Cuba", 19 junio 2007.

<sup>73</sup> BBC Mundo, "Cuba: la oferta europea es insuficiente", 29 junio 2007; Mauricio Vicent, "Castro critica con dureza a la UE por su 'entreguismo' a EE.UU. en relación a Cuba", 26 junio 2007. See text of official reaction in *Granma*, June 27, 2007.

Cuban diplomats offered to explain or “translate” these otherwise clear statements to EU officers, a move that was politely considered as useless.<sup>75</sup> The EU establishment knows very well that the apparently solid Cuban front hides behind different levels of “hardness”. The most moderate, predicted by Brussels (and Madrid and other European capitals), to be the reliable interlocutors in the transition were not the most vocal.<sup>76</sup> As predicted by most keen observers, and sincerely expected in private by government officials and EU staff, the Cuban official response to the EU message sent back the situation to what it was when Spain made the bold move of an opening towards Havana.

Finally, it is significant to note that the meaning of the Common Position of 1996 has been subtly twisted and manipulated by a variety of actors. What originally was simply a set of conditions presented to Cuba for enjoying a cooperation agreement similar to the deals made with the rest of the Latin American countries, it has been “sold” by the Cuban exile community and the U.S. government as “sanctions”, an adjective that has been expanded to illustrate the measures taken in 2005.<sup>77</sup> The Cuban government has gladly accepted the term and its spirit. In the background of the discussions over the decision to lift the measures in 2003, the Cuban government through its representatives in Brussels sent the unequivocal message indicating that there was no chance of an agreement unless the Common Position was lifted.<sup>78</sup> EU circles know very well that there is a double language –one for destined to deal in private with the European power circles, and another used in public responding to the orders made in Cuba.

Although it is a cumbersome dimension which is difficult to be understood by outside observers, there is a sort of “procedural trap” as an obstacle for the lifting of the Position and the measures. On the one hand, it would be actually easier to eliminate the Position because, as a *legal* act, not all members of the Council have to say “yes”. It is enough not to say “no”. This is the special “unanimity” in such legal acts as the Common Position, as a special case of “constructive abstention” that makes possible to reach difficult deals in the EU structure. In contrast, something the Cuban authorities apparently don’t want to accept, the “measures” are a *political* act, decided by the Council as a temporary policy. As such, they can only be eliminated by consensus. In essence, all Member States have to respond with “yes”. Ironically, while they remain “suspended”, the measures (mild by any standards) are “permanently” dead, called “zombies” in EU corridors, and void of any impact.<sup>79</sup>

Besides, the measures are mild by any standards and testimonial in many aspects. For example, the custom to invite members of the opposition to national celebrations is

<sup>74</sup> Fidel Castro, “Reflexiones del Comandante en Jefe: una respuesta digna”, 28 junio 2007. See text in English: <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/junio/juev28/an-honorable-response.html>.

<sup>75</sup> From EU sources.

<sup>76</sup> From Spanish sources.

<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, Commissioner Michel used this term when visiting Havana in February of 2008. Insiders consider this as an individual exceptional expression, more for local Cuban consumption.

<sup>78</sup> From EU sources and European media in Brussels.

<sup>79</sup> From EU sources.

ordinary in Europe. Consequently, the Cuban government should not make a big issue out of it. The ambiguity and the difficulty in profiling the actual level of official visits by EU Member States representatives is also a sign of weakness in the said measures. So, the high cost of the lack of communication generated by the Cuban government was not worth the trouble. Hence, this was the base for the decision of Spain to lead a change in the approach (but not in the essence of the policy).<sup>80</sup>

In this respect, some analysts judge that the Cuban regime actually has not been interested in the ending of the Common Position, a logic that parallels its attitude towards the U.S. embargo. As frequent declarations of Cuban officials including Fidel Castro have illustrated, the Position has been equated to the U.S. policy. The Cuban government then skillfully applies the same treatment to both, interpreting them as examples of economic and political imperialism, blaming them for the economic shortcomings of the Cuban system. It needs to be stressed when dealing with this comparative dimension that the EU Common Position does not plan to bring change to Cuba by coercive means, not even at the height of Aznar's influence, disproving Cuban claims. The question is for how long this nationalist approach will continue to be valid in dealing with the perception of Cuban citizens. That has been the main reason why Spain and other EU partners have been opposed to a strategy that is interpreted as the imposition of "sanctions".

## V

### Conclusions

In this scenario, what Spain and other EU actors can do? One obvious option is to maintain the policy of "constructive dialogue" and the communication with the "real Cuba" and the "official Cuba". With patience, constancy, diplomacy and firmness, the only policy that still has not failed in the Cuban drama could at the end of the road deliver the desired results when at last the full transition to democracy is implemented. Then it will be seen that the brief interlude of almost break of diplomatic relations between 2003 and 2005 was the exception in the close relationship between different governments and regimes since 1898. Only when real change takes place it would be possible to assess the goodness of a policy of open communication. Meanwhile, different European governments with Spain at the helm seem to agree with the above-mentioned popular expression: "don't blame me for trying". This is exactly what several national actors, international officers and dignitaries, and EU institutional representatives have been trying to do since months before the National Assembly election took place, Castro relinquished power and the new government led by Raúl was named:

- Cuba signed the new International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights of the UN and accepted to have meetings with officers of the Human Rights Council (HRC).

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<sup>80</sup> From Spanish government sources.

- As a sign of moderation, Cuba released some prisoners on humanitarian grounds.
- Cardinal Bertone, the Vatican Secretary of State, visited Havana.
- Cardinal Jaime Ortega asked EU Commissioner Michel for the abolition of “sanctions”
- The EU ministerial Troika met with Cuban minister of Foreign Affairs at the UN in September of 2007. Deputy Foreign Minister Eumelio Caballero met with Slovenian ambassador Salej, in preparation for the EU presidency, in October 2007.
- Cuba participated in the European development Days held in Lisbon in November 2007; Cuban Deputy foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez met with Slovenian Secretary of State for development cooperation Andrej Ster and Commissioner Michel.
- Officers of EU’s DG Development visited Cuba in November 2007 and January 2008.
- Teresita Vicente, Cuban Head of the Europe directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Brussels, and held meetings with Marek Grela, Stefano Marservisi and ambassador Salej.
- Spain and Cuba held the second round of dialogue in February 2008
- Foreign Minister Pérez Roque met with Minister Rupel on March 3 in Geneva.
- Cuban Minister of Justice visited Slovenia in March 2008.
- Cuba announced to be willing to have more exploratory meetings at ministerial level if positive results would be envisioned.
- The Cuban embassy in Brussels has engaged in numerous meetings with members of the Commission, Council and the Slovenian Presidency.
- A delegation of the Socialist Group of the EU Parliament headed by Chairman Martin Schulz visited Havana in January 2008 and had conversations with high Cuban officials.
- A delegation of the European Parliament’s Confederal Group of the United Left, headed by Chairman Francis Wurst, visited Havana in February of 2008.
- Spanish MEU Josep Borrell, former president of the EU Parliament, as Chairman of the Development Committee and Francis Wurtz, chairman of the Committee on International Trade, visited Havana in March 2008.

Under the leadership of Spain, Europe should also maintain the requirement of protection of human rights, without media-grabbing declarations that become counterproductive. In this setting, a modification of the Common Position, converted in a simple condition for an effective association status within the ACP group, as it was its original spirit, should be considered. This sensible stance is even more delicate in the coming months presided by the implementation of moderate economic measures by the

new Cuban leadership. Errors committed at this stage may provoke that some day the phrase of “más se perdió en Cuba” may have a different sense.<sup>81</sup>

In any event, at the end of the road, when the transition gets in motion, but not before, the moment of truth would have come to see what kind of new influence Spain and EU partners that share the basic approach on Cuba may have. Meanwhile, the rest of the EU (with the exception of possibly the standard protests from the hardliners) will probably show a “wait and see” attitude that has been the trend until now, responding to what kind of pragmatic priorities are contemplated. Neither Spain nor its EU opponents in the Cuban issue have the capacity to change drastically the current official position and the re-imposition of the temporary measures, unless Cuba makes a reckless move by expanding the arrest pattern.

Nonetheless, the Brussels establishment, reflecting a consensus of the prevalent feeling in the most influential capitals regarding the Cuban issues, increasingly has become more concerned, if not irritated, by the unusual language used by Cuban authorities, echoing the expressions used by Fidel Castro in his writings.<sup>82</sup> The offer to meet in Brussels got, in the view of EU officials, a provocative and an unfriendly reply, less than a respectful “respectful” tone, a fashion that Cubans request. The EU representatives are not happy with what is perceived as a “deliberate misreading” of the EU texts, or relying on a non-representative minority. Brussels would hope that the Cuban declarations would properly take notice that the Common Position explicitly excludes coercive means, so to be differentiated from the U.S. attitude<sup>83</sup> to which is frequently paralleled.<sup>84</sup>

In sum, with the PSOE victory in the Spanish elections of March 2008, no drastic changes are expected in the overall EU’s policy towards, beyond the plan to either reform or abolish the Common Position, but with the priority given to the content and scope of the annual review of the measures suspended in 2005 and an evaluation on the progress made by Cuba, due to be released in July 2008. In expectation of the plans on the Common Position, some MS have issued negative opinions regarding its reform. Sectors of the Cuban exile community and officers of the US government have been very critical, forming a coalition with some European MS, actively working with the Washington establishment. Meetings called by the Slovenia presidency to discuss the policy towards Cuba have caused visible irritation in other embassies excluded from such gatherings. Some liberal sectors of the U.S. media have also issued negative assessment of an alleged backing of Spain and other EU MS to the Cuban regime that has shown little signs of leaving the orthodoxy policy beyond the “cosmetic” measures.<sup>85</sup> This give-and-take will

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<sup>81</sup> For a set of recommendations regarding Spain’s and EU’s options in the context of US policies, see: *Estados Unidos ante la Cuba de Raúl*. Memorando OPEX N° 72/2008. Fundación Alternativas (Madrid) <http://www.falternativas.org/index.php/content/view/490/151/>

<sup>83</sup> This identification is not exclusive of Cuban sources, but also prevalent in left leaning circles in Europe. See: Jean-Michel Caroit, “ ‘Castro light’ peut-il changer Cuba ?”, *Le Monde*, 16.08.07. More elaborate analysis using a table listing show the differences of the goals, methods and expectations of the policy followed by the European Union and the United States. See, for a recent evaluation, the last chapter of the book by Cristina Xalma, *Cuba ¿Hacia dónde?* Barcelona: Icaria, 2007)

<sup>84</sup> From EU sources, confronted with selective perceptions of a number of EU member states governments.

<sup>85</sup> *The Washington Post*, “No space for Dissent”, April 28, 2008.

still take months, without apparent clear signals that Cuba might be immersed in the path towards a real transition --or it may be not.<sup>86</sup> Only then, final judgment on the EU and the Spanish policy of “constructive engagement”<sup>87</sup> towards Cuba will be rendered and dutifully evaluated.

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<sup>86</sup> For a review of the past of the Cuban regime and a speculation about its future, see: Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba hoy: analizando su pasado, imaginando su futuro*. (Madrid: Colibrí, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> For a comparative, comprehensive review of this approach to deal with difficult regimes, see: Mirosław Nincic, “The logic of Positive Engagement: Dealing with Renegade Regimes”, *International Studies Perspectives*, 2006, 7, 321-341.