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*The attitude of
the European Union and Spain
towards Cuba:
an assessment, a year after Castro's illness*

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The attitude of the European Union and Spain towards Cuba: an assessment, a year after Castro's illness[♦]

Joaquín Roy^{*}

A year after the dramatic announcement of Fidel Castro's illness and temporary cession of power to his brother Raúl, the relation between the European Union (EU) and Cuba has returned to a level of normalcy, matching 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.¹ After a prolonged period of "wait and see" by Brussels and some of the most active European governments (led by Spain) in their relationship with Cuba they took some initiatives which resulted in a merely ambivalent response by the Cuban government. These were perceived either as a positive move by certain governments, while the response by others has been interpreted as an aggressive. However, when the special EU Council critical 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, 2006 announcement regarding Castro's health, not much has 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 can be applied to the current chapter of the "special relationship" between Spain and Cuba.

[♦] Paper presented in a summarized version at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) congress held in Montreal, Canada, September 5-9, 2007. This document is a follow-up to a previous report made in the aftermath of the Castro's illness and temporary cession of powers on August 1, 2006: "From stubbornness and mutual irrelevancy to stillness and vigil on Castro's crisis: The current state of European Union-Spain-Cuba relations". Occasional Paper. Jean Monnet Chair/European Union Center. Special August/September 2006. Reproduced by Real Instituto Elcano <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/253.asp> Available at website of Fundación Alternativas (Madrid): http://www.falternativas.org/base/download/bc80_28-08-06_vigil-EN-paper.pdf. Gratitude is extended to María Lorca for assistance in systematizing the trade and debt figures in the graphs included in appendix.

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¹ For a review of the year: "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

A wider context

The bold move executed by the Spanish government during the Easter week 2007 towards Cuba surprised 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. The risky trip taken by Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos to Havana has to be seen within a wider context regarding the European perception of the Cuban scene which needs to be viewed more closely.²

This setting is basically composed of reading 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 socio-political fabric. The conclusion of this search will reveal that not much substantial has changed regarding the potential happening of epoch-making events, at least from the level of what was expected from the serious medical condition and the proximity of the potential death of Castro. However, the impasse has 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, informing the European attitude accordingly. Although the overall posture of the United States towards Cuba did not change noticeably since the crisis as a result of Castro's illness, some events initially revealed internal contradictions, erratic decisions and ambivalence towards the desires of different sectors of the Cuban exile community.

On the strictly U.S. front, the signals emanating from Washington when the Castro's illness was announced were cautious and continued to reaffirm the administration wish for the return of democracy to Cuba, controlled by the Cuban people³. At the same time, the U.S. government warned the Cuban exile community to not rush towards strategically priming the return of the properties confiscated by the Cuban revolution. Then a call by Cuban Secretary of Commerce Gutiérrez for a referendum to be taken by the Cuban government was interpreted as willingness to cooperate with a regime in transition, though still with Raúl Castro in command, a thought that enraged the hardliners in the Cuban community and the U.S. congressional representation.⁴ Statements of moderation by U.S. Under Secretary of State for Hemispheric Affairs, Thomas Shannon, contrasted with predictions of an imminent death of Castro made by his superior, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.⁵ Castro apparently answered this exchange by appearing in videos and photos with visitors.⁶ When in November 2006 an extended

² For a reaction to the events made by the author, see these columns: "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/cdscdi/20061021cdscdiopi_5/Tes/

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

³ EFE, "McCarry: Cuba debe decidir sin injerencias". Diario las Américas, 29 septiembre 2006.

⁴ P. Bachelet. "Proponen que la OEA prepare referendo en Cuba". El Nuevo Herald, 15 septiembre 2006;

Pablo Bachelet. "U.S.: Allow Cubans to vote on Raúl". The Miami Herald, 15 setiembre 2006; Otto Reich.

"Don't fall for regime's manipulation of public opinion". The Miami Herald, 15 setiembre 2006; Pablo

Bachelet. "Reaction to Cuba proposal split". The Miami Herald, 16 setiembre 2006; Rui Ferreira.

"Rechazan la propuesta de referendo en Cuba". El Nuevo Herald, 16 setiembre 2006.

⁵ Nestor Ikeda. "Negroponte afirma que a Castro le quedan meses". El Nuevo Herald, 16 diciembre 2006.

⁶ Frances Robles. "Castro says his recuperation is going well but will be long". The Miami Herald, 6 septiembre 2006; Nancy San Martín. "Animated Castro shown in new video". The Miami Herald, 2

period of time had passed without Castro showing up, while U.S. publications stated he had cancer,⁷ a new video dispelled rumors but confirmed his weak condition.⁸ However, he did not appear in the proceedings of the Non-Aligned Movement gathering in Havana nor in the celebrations held on December 2, 2006, for the 50th anniversary of the landing of the “Granma” on Cuba’s shores, as a foundation of the new Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). This event was heralded in August as a delayed Castro’s 80th birthday celebration.⁹

Verbal confrontations were interlaced with behind the scenes continuous cooperation between Havana and Washington in certain sensitive fields such as migration. The United States has the only migratory agreement in the world with Cuba. It has a ceiling of 20,000 visas per year and it was crafted as a result of the 1994 new “balsero” crisis that threatened to turn into a second Mariel boat lift. Although the agreement has proceeded smoothly over the years (it benefits both sides), the recent animosity between the Bush administration and the Cuban government has produced a policy of limiting the number of U.S. staff and Cuban employees working in the interest section in Havana in retaliation for the U.S. strategy of criticizing human rights abuses. On July 18, 2007, the U.S. government announced it could not meet the quota for lack of staff resources, caused by the Cuban restrictions, an accusation rejected by the Ministry of Foreign Relations.¹⁰

One needs to recall that just months earlier a full U.S. congressional delegation visited Cuba while U.S. governors held trade meetings with Cuban officials and called for an end to the embargo and travel restrictions¹¹. President Bush maintained a hard line approach and vouched for a veto in case Congress would vote for an end of the sanctions. Discoveries of new cases of Cuban spying in the United States¹² kept the tension between the two countries high while the Cuban leadership made offers of negotiations, demanding mutual respect.¹³ Nonetheless, the

septiembre 2006; Rui Ferreira. “Muestran un nuevo video de un frágil Fidel Castro”. El Nuevo Herald, 2 septiembre 2006; Isabel Sánchez. “Castro aparece parado en video con Chávez”. El Nuevo Herald, 15 septiembre 2006; Isabel Sánchez. “Hasta la Victoria siempre, venceremos”, dijeron Castro y Chávez en TV”. Diario las Américas, 3 septiembre 2006.

⁷ Pablo Bachelet. “Castro has 18 months to live U.S. believes”. The Miami Herald, 13 noviembre 2006; EFE. “Castro tiene cáncer terminal, afirma Time”. El Nuevo Herald, 8 octubre 2006; Mauricio Vicent. “40 días sin noticias de Fidel Castro”. El País, 27 octubre 2006; EFE. “Castro tiene Cáncer, según Times”. Diario las Américas, 10 octubre 2006; Rally B. Donnelly y Timothy J. Burger/Washington. “Castro is reported to have a cancer”. Time, October 7, 2006.

⁸ Pablo Bachelet y Frances Robles. “Dudan que Castro vuelva a gobernar”. The Miami Herald, 3 noviembre 2006; Pablo Bachelet y Frances Robles. “Castro video shows illness is serious”. The Miami Herald, 3 noviembre 2006.

⁹ EFE. “Preparan un desfile militar para Castro”. El Nuevo Herald, 21 noviembre 2006; Agence France Presse. “Esperan a mil personalidades en cumpleaños de Castro”. 17 noviembre 2006; Isabel Sánchez. “Alimenta las dudas ausencia de Castro en homenaje”. El Nuevo Herald, 30 noviembre 2006; Agence France Presse. “Comienzan en Cuba los homenajes a Castro sin su presencia”. El Nuevo Herald, 29 noviembre 2006; Frances Robles. “Castro a no-show for his 80th birthday party”. The Miami Herald, 29 noviembre 2006; Isabel Sánchez. “Dan una fiesta...y los Castro no aparecen”. Diario las Américas, 30 noviembre 2006.

¹⁰ “Cuba niega ser la Cuba/EEUU.- Cuba niega responsable de que EEUU no vaya a alcanzar la cuota de 20.000 visados anuales para cubanos”, Europa Press, 20 julio 2007.

¹¹ Pablo Bachelet. “U.S. congressional delegation arrives”. 16 diciembre 2006; Granma. “Llegó a Cuba delegación de diez congresistas norteamericanos”. 18 diciembre 2006; Mauricio Vicent. “EE UU y Cuba tratan de abrir una nueva etapa en sus relaciones”. El País, 17 diciembre 2006; Vanessa Arrington. “Fidel doesn’t have cancer, Cubans tell U.S. delegation”. The Miami Herald, 18 diciembre 2006; José Luis Paniagua. “Congresistas regresan con las manos vacías”. El Nuevo Herald, 18 diciembre 2006; José Luis Paniagua. “Cuba no admite nueva era”. Diario las Américas 19 diciembre 2006; EFE. “Opiniones distintas en la disidencia por visita congresistas”. Diario las Américas, 21 diciembre 2006; Mauricio Vicent. “Ladelegación de EE UU concluye su visita a Cuba sin esperanzas de cambio”. 18 diciembre 2006.

¹² Jay Weaver. “2 in spy case to accept plea deal”. The Miami Herald, 16 diciembre 2006; Jay Weaver. “Cambian cargos a ex profesor de FIU y su esposa”. El Nuevo Herald, 16 diciembre 2006; Jay Weaver. “Couple strikes plea deal in Fidel Castro ‘spy’ case”. The Miami Herald, 20 diciembre 2006.

¹³ For a sample of press reports: Europa Press. “La Casa Blanca considera confirmadas sus sospechas de transición en Cuba”. El País, 6 diciembre 2006; Frances Robles, “Raúl sits in at big party”, The Miami Herald, December 2, 2007; Juan Benemelis, “La larga marcha de la sucesión en Cuba”, El Nuevo Herald, 17 diciembre 2007; Diario las Américas,

stalemate continued and the Cuban-U.S. relationship has been reduced to the usual exchange of barbs across the Florida straights. Meanwhile, in the annual vote held at the United Nations pertaining to this stalemate, the United States was again censored for the continuation of their embargo, which gives Cuba in turn a renewed excuse for its own shortcomings.¹⁴

In the U.S.-Cuban exile theatre, foreign observers and especially European analysts were fascinated by the spectacular declarations of joy in Miami when Castro's illness was announced and then by plans to hold a party at the Orange Bowl to celebrate his eventual death. While wide sectors of the Cuban community showed signs of moderation and revealed the evolution of its political views in the polls, the hard-line attitude remained well anchored in the congressional representation. The number of Cuban exiles supporting the continuation of limitations to travel and send funds to relatives has notably diminished over the recent years.¹⁵ Divisions over the effectiveness of the embargo and its eventual dismantling have divided the core of the Cuban community in the U.S., a trend that became notorious when the Castro's illness crisis erupted.¹⁶ In this setting, scandals mired the performance of enterprises that were the result of the impressive 80's and 90's lobbying work performed by the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Radio Martí and TV Martí were questioned by investigative reporters¹⁷. It was discovered that house staff at the Miami Herald conglomerate were working for these two government-sponsored media entities, which resulted in firings, reinstatements, and resignations of both American and Cuban journalists.¹⁸ A disgruntled El Nuevo Herald caricaturist held the staff of the newspaper hostage with resulting Cuban-American community embarrassment.¹⁹

"Fidel no aparece", 3 diciembre 2007; José Manuel Calvo, "EEUU aguarda el final del pulso", 3 diciembre 2007; Frances Robles, "A party without Castro", The Miami Herald, December 3, 2007; Gladys Amador, y Elías López, "Ausencia de Castro no da esperanzas a exiliados cubanos", El Nuevo Herald, 3 diciembre 2007; Rui Ferreira, "Fidel Castro no aparece", El Nuevo Herald, 3 diciembre 2007.

¹⁴ Reuters. "La ONU condena el embargo de EEUU a Cuba en una votación récord". 11 agosto 2006; Edith M. Lederer. "End Cuba ban, U.N. urges U.S.". The Miami Herald, 9 noviembre 2006; The Miami Herald (editorial). "Don't blame embargo for Cuba's problems". 11 noviembre 2006.

¹⁵ Diario las Américas, "Panel discutirá encuesta de FIU, 2 abril 2007; Uva de Aragón, "Cómo piensan los cubanos en Miami", Diario las Américas, 12 abril 2007; Pablo Bachelet, "Una encuesta revela cambios", El Nuevo Herald, 2 abril 2007; Pablo Bachelet, "Fewer support sanctions", 2 abril 2007.

¹⁶ EFE. "Exilio cubano a favor de diálogo de EEUU con Cuba, según sondeo". 2 octubre 2007; Rui Ferreira. "El exilio piensa que Castro no vuelve al poder". El Nuevo Herald, 2 octubre 2006.

¹⁷ El Nuevo Herald. "Acusan de actividad ilegal a funcionario de TV Martí". 18 noviembre 2006; Oscar Corral. "TV Martí executive indicted". The Miami Herald, 18 noviembre 2006; Oscar Corral. "By far the most expensive among U.S.-financed broadcasts, Radio and TV Martí now face another government audit of their operations at a critical juncture in U.S.-Cuba relations". The Miami Herald, 18 diciembre 2006.

¹⁸ Gerardo Reyes y Joaquim Utset. "Los pagos a periodistas son una practica común". El Nuevo Herald, 14 septiembre 2006; Casey Woods. "Report: U.S. paid many other journalists". The Miami Herald, 14 septiembre 2006; Oscar Corral. "10 Miami journalists take U.S. pay". The Miami Herald, 8 septiembre 2006; Carlos Alberto Montaner. "Respuesta de Montaner". El Nuevo Herald, 9 septiembre 2006; Carlos Alberto Montaner. "Mi defensa contra la difamación". El Nuevo Herald, 17 septiembre 2006; Jesús Díaz Jr. "Una prensa libre puede requerir decisiones penosas". El Nuevo Herald, 18 septiembre 2006; Jesús Díaz Jr. "A free press can require painful choices". The Miami Herald, 17 septiembre 2006; José Ignacio Rasco. "Fusilamiento moral de periodistas". Diario las Américas, 20 septiembre 2006; Alejandro Armengol. "Causa y Verdad". El Nuevo Herald, 27 septiembre 2006; Tom Fielder. "An apology over my words". The Miami Herald, 5 octubre 2006; Tom Fiedler. "Disculpas por mis palabras". El Nuevo Herald, 5 octubre 2006; Douglas Hanks. "A column, a quarrel and change at the top". The Miami Herald, 4 octubre 2006; John Dorschner. "Miami native accepts challenge". The Miami Herald, 4 octubre 2006; Jesús Díaz Jr. "Herald publisher will resign". The Miami Herald, 3 octubre 2006; Pablo Alfonso. "Carta abierta a los electores". El Nuevo Herald, 8 octubre 2006; Oscar Corral. "Fired writer: Radio Martí ties no secret". The Miami Herald, 12 septiembre 2006; Joe Strupp. "Preview of Hoyt's report on flawed Herald coverage". 18 noviembre 2006; Sam Terilli. "Keep media independent of the government" The Miami Herald, 19 septiembre 2006; Christina Hoag. "Gyllenhaal to succeed Fiedler as top editor". The Miami Herald, 16 diciembre 2006; Christina Hoag. "Nuevo director The Miami Herald". El Nuevo Herald, 16 diciembre 2006.

¹⁹ David Ovalle y Martín Merzer. "Man with submachine gun arrested standoff at Miami Herald". The Miami Herald, November 24, 2006; Rui Ferreira, Joaquim Utset y Alejandro Chaparro. El Nuevo Herald, "Se entrega caricaturista atrincherado en El Nuevo Herald", 24 noviembre 2006.; Rui Ferreira. "Sale en libertad bajo fianza caricaturista José Manuel Varela". El Nuevo Herald, 28 noviembre 2006.

Meanwhile, programs run by USAID²⁰ for the promotion of democracy in Cuba were evaluated as ineffective and only benefiting domestic interests and individuals. The case of Luis Posada Carriles, an alleged accomplice of the bombing of a Cuban airliner in 1976, who was arrested in Miami in 2006 on charges of illegal immigration, contributed even more to the erosion of the influence of the Cuban exile views. This loss of face was renewed when he was released in April 2007. The Cuban government has exploited this case world-wide in the context of the U.S. fight against terrorism. Furthermore, this case has served to neutralize the arrest and sentencing of five alleged Cuban spies in Miami, converted into “the five heroes” and used in the multiple demonstrations, marches, and commemorations.

It is not surprising then that the Cuban regime has been enjoying a renewed backing in Latin America, emanating not only from staunch allies such as Venezuela’s Chávez, who has become an official spokesman for Cuba in the world, but also from additional partners (Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador) that expressly share the revolutionary views of Caracas and Havana. The rest of the continent has remained generally silent (with the notable exceptions of Costa Rica’s Oscar Arias²¹ and El Salvador’s Antonio Elías Saca) in criticism of Raúl Castro’s leadership.

In this setting, Cuba managed to moderately pass the test of holding the meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement,²² while cracking down on dissidents, imposing tougher rules on the foreign press, expelling selective reporters, and banning others from coming. Reinforcing its control over media and communication, the government declared a wave of harassment against the “illegal” use of TV antennas and further curtailing the private capacity and use of internet and digital communications, giving Cuba a failing report in this field in the context of the developing world.

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.

Rui Ferreira. “Caricaturista de El Nuevo Herald se atrinchera en el periódico”. 24 noviembre 2006; Rui Ferreira. “Sale en libertad bajo fianza caricaturista José Manuel Varela”. El Nuevo Herald, 28 noviembre 2006; Rui Ferreira y Joaquim Utset. “Horas de tensión en el Herald”. El Nuevo Herald, 24 Noviembre 2006; David Ovalle, Alfonso Chardy y Martín Merzer. “Standoff at Herald ends with surrender”. The Miami Herald, November 25, 2006.

²⁰ The Miami Herald (editorial). “U.S. Plan ineffective by design”. 19 noviembre 2006; Ana Méndez. “Now fighting Fidel Castro: Hello Kitty”. The Miami Herald, 19 noviembre 2006; GAO. “U.S. Democracy assistance for Cuba needs better management and oversight”. November 2006; GAO. “What GAO found”. November 2006; O. Corral y P. Bachelet. “Cuestionan el uso de fondos para la democracia en Cuba”. El Nuevo Herald, 15 noviembre 2006; Gerardo Reyes. “Serios fallos con fondos para la libertad de Cuba”. El Nuevo Herald, 15 noviembre 2006; Oscar Corral. “Is U.S. aid reaching Castro foes?” The Miami Herald, November 15, 2006; Pablo Bachelet. “Bajo la lupa programas para promover el cambio”. El Nuevo Herald, 16 noviembre 2006; Oscar Corral. “Cuba thwarts U.S. efforts to help dissidents”. The Miami Herald, 16 noviembre 2006; David Adams. “Informe pone ayuda a Cuba bajo el microscopio”. Diario las Américas, 17 noviembre 2006; EFE. “Disidencia dividida sobre fondos de EE.UU”. Diario las Américas, 18 noviembre 2006.

²¹ EFE. “Oscar Arias aboga por cambio político en Cuba”. Diario las Américas, 15 septiembre 2006. Oscar Arias Sánchez. “Cuba’s dictatorship is ripe for transition”. El Nuevo Herald, 29 agosto 2006; EFE. “Arias denuncia campaña contra Costa Rica”. El Nuevo Herald, 10 octubre 2006.

²² Andrés Oppenheimer. “No alienados y petropopulismo”. El Nuevo Herald, 14 septiembre 2006; Frances Robles. “Will Castro be a no-show host?”. The Miami Herald, 12 septiembre 2006; Anita Snow. “Castro likely won’t host summit dinner”. The Miami Herald, 11 septiembre 2006; Miriam Leiva. “Las paradojas de la cumbre”. El Nuevo Herald, 9 septiembre 2006; Eduardo Castillo. “Raúl Castro estrena su cargo en la cumbre de NOAL”. El Nuevo Herald, 16 septiembre 2006; Marc Frank. “Non-aligned nations nudged toward anti-US stance by Cuba”. The Financial Times, 16 septiembre 2006.

Within this general panorama, one EU member state was consistently singled out: Spain. This is partly explained by Spain's historical, undisputed intimate linkage with Cuba. A selective poll taken with EU officials and European diplomats with Cuban interests and duties place Spain as number #1 in the ranking of EU Member States having influence in EU-Cuba affairs.²³ Its leadership in the context of the European-Cuban relationship was either scrutinized or questioned, while receiving encouragement and pressure to take action in one direction or another. In general terms, over the recent years the most decisive measures taken by EU institutions reflect in one way or another, initiatives 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, the general script then changed in the direction of new proposals. 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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 Party (PSOE) policy towards Cuba have frequently visited Washington (former Premier Aznar,²⁶ most prominently) and Miami, making declarations and giving interviews to receptive audiences and media.²⁷ The consensus that existed in the 80's and 90's between the two major Spanish parties was terminated once the policy towards Cuba became 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.

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 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 in connection with Castro's illness put the relationship on hold.

Nevertheless, Spain seemed to be destined not to disappear from the scene. It is not by coincidence that explicit declarations regarding Castro's medical condition would not come from the Cuban government, labeling the issue a "secret of state". News correcting the near-death assessment made by U.S. officials, would come from Venezuela's Chávez and from a Spanish

²³ Spain is followed by: France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Czech Republic, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Portugal (for its coming presidency of the EU).

²⁴ From EU sources in Brussels and Madrid (June 2007).

²⁵ 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". 15 octubre 2006.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Ariel Remos, "Ofrece PP español alternativa de centro liberal y reformista", Diario las Américas, 24 abril 2007.

doctor who had the chance of examining Castro, making the unusual declaration that he did not have cancer, predicting that he would recover soon, and be ready to resume power.²⁸

A standing assessment

Any consideration of the EU-Cuba relationship, based on an analytical reading of the different alternatives available for European action and the approach to a changing Cuba must be placed in the context of a minimum cluster of parameters regarding the 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.

Regarding the economic scene, the first concern expressed by European analysts and 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 by 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 benefits rendered by the medical services provided by Cuba to Venezuela.²⁹ 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 plans to end the double use of local currency, claiming that 57 percent of the population already received hard currency.³⁰

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 events derived from the crisis of July 31, 2006, the announcement of the illness of Fidel Castro.

The first scenario is the one that has survived over the months since August 2007 and shows the potential to be extended for the rest of 2007 (and spilling over into 2008), depending on the evolution of Fidel Castro's health. The power structure is what can be labeled, 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 and alleged details of his health 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, have been under the control of Raúl and his collaborators, as delegates of precise duties. In essence, this analysis has corrected in a certain degree the assessment made right after the announcement of

²⁸ EFE. "El jefe de cirugía del Gregorio Marañón viaja a La Habana para operar Castro". El Mundo, 24 diciembre 2006; J.D. "Un hombre optimista". 27 diciembre 2006; Pablo Bachelet. "U.S. holds to claim Castro is dying". The Miami Herald, 6 enero 2007; Reuters. "La recuperación de Castro es lenta pero progresiva, según un médico español". 19 enero 2007; John Dorschner y Nancy San Martín. "Report may mean Castro has little chance of recovery, experts say". The Miami Herald, January 16, 2007; Oriol Güell y Ana Alfageme. "Castro optó por someterse a la técnica quirúrgica que luego causó complicaciones". El País, 17 enero 2007; Editorial. "Fidel, Menos secreto". El País, 17 enero 2007; Oriol Güell y Ana Alfageme. "Una cadena de actuaciones médicas fallidas agravó el estado de Castro". El País, 16 enero 2007.

²⁹ From various EU sources.

³⁰ Andrea Rodríguez, "Estudian en Cuba poner fin a la doble circulación de moneda", El Nuevo Herald, 29 abril 2007.

Castro's illness that nothing would be the same in the Cuban scene.³¹ For that, one will have to wait for a more drastic biological change.

In the European analysis, the balance of the performance of Raúl Castro is that in this first stage he has been an equal on the leadership level, but he appears no longer to be merely No. 2. However, this does not mean that he has had the maneuvering space he would face once his brother physically and terminally disappears from the scene. Fidel's "presence of his absence" (to use a metaphor developed by insiders) is too strong to consider his brother's role autonomous and decisive.

There is 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 has systematically contacted the different ministers handling portions of the authority delegated by him on August 1. But no one seems to be able to correctly interpret the real meaning that Fidel does not call his brother "too often", and that he does not "interfere" [his own words given in an unusual rush interview given while visiting the book fair in Havana] with the day-to-day business of state.

The reality offered by this scenario is that European observers must recognize that they know the same as U.S. analysts do – not much. The Cuban government has given few signals to Brussels for taking a new approach and speed up the implementation of new measures, offer new alternatives, or announce new incentives or pressure. The only clear detail was that Raúl Castro has reaffirmed during this entire time his intention of tackling what he calls 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 in the European analysis that Raúl may try to test an experimentation with certain alternatives for opening the economy following the Chinese or Vietnamese models. However, the path for reformatting and change is not guaranteed. Nonetheless, European observers have already noted that the modest "opening" for a renewed cultural debate is not an isolated event and that it has to be placed in a wider setting of at least testing the waters.

Dealing with the United States and the rest of the Americas

Beyond this, the other available variable is the odd double relationship with two much closer actors: the United States and Venezuela. In this sense, as mentioned above, it is a fact that Raúl Castro offered, at least on two public occasions (and possibly behind the scenes), a deal for an accommodation with the United States, subject to mutual respect. The most spectacular example of this was given within his speech at the ceremony and parade to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Granma's feat. Washington, at least in public, has rejected this overture, but it is suspected that talks have been under way.

However, the bulk of the previous commercial and political understanding has continued with no noticeable changes. On the one hand, the United States has become the second most important economic partner of Cuba, thanks to the steady pattern of purchases of U.S. food and medicine supplies. Additionally, both countries have continued to respect the migratory agreements and security arrangements.³²

Meanwhile, Brussels and many other European capitals have noted that in the short term Cuba does not need a reinforcement of the U.S. relationship – Raúl is adequately positioned through his strategic alliance with Venezuela. Hence, he does not miss any other additional disadvantageous accommodation with the European Union either. Although few expect a hardening in his public confrontations with the EU and some European governments which had

³¹ See Roy, "From stubbornness..."

³²For a review of recent trends and a consideration of the future, see: William Leo Grande, "Las relaciones futuras de Cuba con Estados Unidos", Pérez-Stable, 305-334.

been the norm before lifting the temporary measures in early 2005, the EU institutions have been predicting a continuation of the stalemate in a relationship that is best described as “mutual irrelevancy” – both parties have reached the conclusion that they cannot influence each other. So the logic has been: why bother too much beyond the usual requests?

This situation, which has existed since before the crisis of Fidel Castro’s illness, has continued while the willingness to continue with the overall approach of “constructive engagement” has been respected and passively recorded by Havana. A ranking of EU states exercising this policy shows Spain on the forefront of all, followed by Belgium and Italy.³³ Only one important correction to this trend has become noticeable: a deepening of the opposition’s approach (taken by some Central European governments, notoriously the Czech Republic, which leads the ranking of EU Member States perceived as hard-liners on Cuba).³⁴ This has generated a verbal aggressive response given by the Cuban government and its media, blaming the EU for allegedly caving in to this pressure and mirroring the strategy of the United States.

Hence the overall result is that EU observers are in good company with the United States leadership and analysts – Europe is not needed by the “Castro duo”. This perception and its empirically demonstrated evidence were confirmed, as the last part of this paper further expands, when Cuba reacted bluntly to the mixed offer of cooperation in June of 2007, inviting a Cuban delegation to visit Brussels to discuss a wide agenda. While some years ago this rejection might have been dictated by ideology and the need to construct an additional “enemy”, today there is an empirical economic factor added to the equation: Chávez has filled the vacuum of alternative dependency for the moment. Moreover, the evolution of events and the prospects of a second scenario (an effective succession from a deceased Fidel to Raúl) have influenced EU-observers to reconsider the reality of European involvement and interests in Cuba.

From opening to the unknown

There has been very little ground to envision what kind of alternatives Raúl might devise then. According to European speculation, two important dimensions are worth consideration, both connected with the role of military. On the one hand, European interests are eager to explore the possible new role which nationalism will play in that period.³⁵ On the other hand, attention is paid to the sense of professionalism which 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.³⁶ In this scenario, the enigma would be if in the first stage of the opening of the system there were a return of the limited private initiative experiments of the first part of the 1990’s. How this would be connected to a further incentive for a renewed and more aggressive European investment is a variable whose outcome is difficult and cumbersome to evaluate.

The impact of a decision to open the economic and political system as a result of an effective transition is a panorama with high 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 extent 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

³³ Next in the reputational list taken in interviews with EU institutions and EU Member States officials are: France, Sweden (in development assistance), United Kingdom (in banking operations), Germany, Netherlands (investments in nickel), Austria, Denmark, Finland (as result of its EU presidency in the second part of 2006).

³⁴ The Czech Republic is followed by Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Hungary.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.

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 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. The 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.

Two Cuban communities in transit

European observers are concerned with the fact that two key sectors would have a voice in the future evolution of Cuba, which at the moment do not appear to show the cohesiveness and the capacity to influence the outcome of either a violence-free succession, or a peaceful transition: One is the domestic "dissident" sector; the other is the exile community.

On the other hand, analysts may note that as a response to the prudence of the European consensus (only broken by the selective individual actions taken by some governments), the Cuban regime has rewarded this with some timid liberations of ill prisoners³⁷ while sentencing others,³⁸ and with the provocation of publishing notes in the government press, expressing extremely harsh criticism of the standing policy of the EU. In this setting, European observers have certified the fragility of the Cuban social fabric, where dissidents are extremely divided and their organizations are heavily infiltrated by the intelligence services of the regime. Simultaneously, the divergent attitudes of the Cuban exile community do not seem to be in synch with the stalled situation in Cuba. They are also not perceived to have a clear influence on the restructuring of the embargo parameters beyond the prevalent inertia.

In this domestic Cuban scenario, the consensus of European analysis points out that the Cuban population is roughly divided into to over 80 percent into those who dedicate themselves to the daily duty of "resolver" and "inventar", while barely 20 percent engage in one way or another in trying to leave by legal or illegal means, and a tiny less than one percent that acts under the cover of one of the dissident units. This dissident "movement", in the European vision, is highly divided, uncoordinated, and infiltrated by Cuban state security. As a whole, it lacks a clear strategy towards the future, beyond the frontal, pacific opposition attitude to the system. All groups try to do their best. Observers in Europe consider that the exception regarding the "vision" is the Varela Project presented by Oswaldo Payá, whose group is morally backed by mostly

³⁷ EFE, "Antúnez dispuesto a seguir actividad disidente en Cuba", *Diario las Américas*, 25 abril 2007; EFE, "Insuficiente liberación de presos en Cuba", *El Nuevo Herald*, 25 abril 2007

³⁸ AFP, "12 años de prisión", *Diario las Américas*, 24 abril 2007.

Christian-Democratic sectors, and Arco Progresista, led by Social Democratic dissident Manuel Cuesta Murúa, This group, along the one led by Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, who left his exile in Miami to reside in Cuba, is the one favored by Socialist parties in Europe, especially the PSOE.³⁹ Predictions are that at the moment in which the political transition gets in motion, these circles will eventually be transformed into political parties.

In Brussels and in influential European foreign ministries it is believed that a possible lifting of some of the codified conditions of the embargo could result from a combination of two additional factors. On the one hand, it will be difficult to sustain the pressure of U.S. commercial interests that do not want to miss the opportunity to sell food and medicines to Cuba, sectors that have made the United States the second most important trade partner. On the other hand, the hardliners of the Cuban exile community will lobby to maintain their influence to oppose lifting the embargo as such, without an explicit compensation from the Cuban regime. However, at the same time, this sector, in alliance with the 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 whose sole victims are those sectors in the exile community with limited income and the families left behind).

The European perception of the Cuban exile community has not changed dramatically in recent months.⁴⁰ Considerable evolution towards coordinating efforts (Consenso Cubano) and a moderating movement (e.g. the change of attitudes in emblematic organizations such as the Cuban American National Foundation) have been detected. However, the international perception of the most vocal and publicity-seeking circles is still dominated by their resistance to a compromise and accommodation to the evolving circumstances. When exploring the options for the Cuban exile community to facilitate a peaceful transition, even at the price of tolerating a solid succession in Cuba, the EU's consensus recommendation (with the exception of the minority opposing a diplomatic attitude) has been to develop a special variance of the European approach of "constructive engagement", with due adaptations and specificities.

On the one hand, the leading proactive groups that are members in the Consenso coalition do not view the U.S. federal government's as their own as their actions and designs differ from Washington's framework. On the other hand, EU observers deem a certain degree of clarification regarding the embargo and the relationship between "the two active Cubas" (the dissidents and the most innovative exile sectors) as necessary. This clarification should be entertained in light of the ultimate beneficiaries (or victims) of future actions, i.e. those ten million-plus Cubans living on the island and the almost two million Cubans residing in a world-wide diaspora.

Regarding the embargo, while EU opposition is based on principles as well as 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 in counteracting the negative balance of its empirical failure in obtaining its principal goal: the sudden collapse of the Cuban regime. In the Brussels analysis there is a flagrant contradiction in stating that the poor U.S.-Cuba relationship (embargo included) is not an international, but a domestic issue (Florida electoral clout), while at the same time claiming not to speak for the U.S. government, and ultimately demanding to deal directly with Cuba's population, leaving them with 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

³⁹ From EU and Spanish sources.

⁴⁰ For a recent analysis of the changing exile from an insider, see: Lisandro Pérez, "La comunidad emigrada cubana y el futuro de Cuba", Pérez-Stable, 267-288.

lobbying of Cuban exile influential groups.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

Reflecting on the ban of official EU aid to Cuba under the claim that it mirrors the "imperialistic" intromission practiced by the United States, Brussels insiders share the view with Cuban exiles as to the need not to connect (at least publicly) 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 add more fuel to the fire, raising fears in the majority of the population exclusively engaged in "resolver" for their 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 which were in the past considered "fundamentalist" against 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 amount and the frequency of remittances being channeled by Cuban exiles to relatives in Cuba.⁴³ This kind of people-to-people engagement is the most productive way to a direct relationship, which reduces 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.

From prudence to bold action

Since the crisis as a result of Fidel Castro's illness exploded and the temporary and limited cession of power was announced, most predictions regarding a new European (and specially Spanish) strategy towards Cuba were fulfilled for over eight months. 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 European Union and leading Member States (by their historical legacy and other influence-making factors) in their policy towards Cuba reaffirmed a cautious attitude. Innovative political and economic frameworks were frozen since Raúl Castro took over the conditional 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 for forty-seven years.

All things considered, that was not the right time for risky movements. Consequently Europe considered during this time that circumstances were not propitious to execute a considerable gear shift either in its explicit general policy or in their individual lines of action.

On the one hand, 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 the intent to wait. On the other hand, the prevailing consensus (difficult and arduous in its precarious existing state) confirmed the necessity not to change the situation in the middle of 2006 before the onset of Fidel Castro's illness. But the impasse has 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

⁴¹ 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

⁴² From interviews held in Miami with the leadership of several exile organizations (February-April 2007).

⁴³ From interviews held in Miami (March 2007).

frozen.⁴⁴ Waiting for better perspectives, those actors equipped with a stronger influence (Spain at the forefront) were energetically opposed to the codification (another potential “common position”). This would have made the necessary maneuvering flexibility to act according to the unforeseeable circumstances that are arising more difficult, and additionally giving the Cuban regime a new excuse for suffering harassment U.S.-style.

Furthermore, the only other explicit declaration has been the semester update 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), which had been eliminated (but still subject to an annual evaluation) at the beginning of 2005.⁴⁵ Therefore, the official attitude of the EU has continued to practically be identical to that 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 criticism of the human rights situation.

Several factors have contributed to this activity (or lack of it). One comes 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 is recovering. This provisionality would only be clarified with his death or full return to power. 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 consequently 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 in 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 which does seem to be on the horizon, what options were there available? 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 Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the decision to reestablish full communication with the Cuban government through the public signing of accord in the fields of economics, investment, and a political dialogue including human rights.⁴⁶ As an immediate result, commentaries ranged from silence and prudence to overt criticism and finger pointing on the motivations behind.⁴⁷ 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

⁴⁴ See Roy, “From stubbornness”

⁴⁵ For details, see Roy, “From stubbornness”.

⁴⁶ 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.com, 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.

⁴⁷ 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 NuevoHerald, 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.

an alternative, the scheduling of interviews with a lower level representation).⁴⁸ Voices in the exile sectors pointed out that the move had a predominantly economic explanation,⁴⁹ – Spain was tending to its investments, seeking protection for current operations and expecting devolution or compensation for past terminated partnerships.⁵⁰ Significantly, the frustration over the visit of Moratinos and the lack of a scheduled interview with the dissident community prompted some of these groups to sign a commitment of unity, although they denied the link between the visit and their decision.⁵¹ Subsequently, a timely conference was held in Berlin, under the sponsorship of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, in which former Prime Minister Aznar sent a renewed critical view of the Spanish government's policy in Cuba.⁵²

The Spanish move also gave a new base for the Spanish political opposition to attack the foreign policy of Premier Rodríguez Zapatero.⁵³ 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*.⁵⁴ This influential newspaper awarded its Ortega y Gasset Prize to exile dissident Raúl Rivero, who was liberated in 2005 thanks to the role played by the Spanish government.⁵⁵ 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,⁵⁶ the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs responded that the dialogue strategy will be the most effective and expressed commitment towards the dissidents.⁵⁷ 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 leverage and was unable to obtain results.⁵⁸

Finally, it raised questions from the U.S. government,⁵⁹ alluding to a lack of consultation,⁶⁰ to which the Spanish government responded tersely and with blunt statements.

⁴⁸ 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 NuevoHerald.com*, 5 abril 2007.

⁴⁹ 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. For a summary of the figures of European Union-Cuba and Spain-Cuba trade, see graphs and tables #1, #2, and #3 in appendix.

⁵⁰ *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.

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² EFE, "Aznar y Havel apoyan cambio en Cuba", *Diario las Américas*, 25 abril 2007.

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ *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.

⁵⁵ AP, "Exile Cuban journalist honored", *The Miami Herald*, April 28, 2007.

⁵⁶ The reason for this precise number is unknown, because reliable calculations raise the figure to over 270.

⁵⁷ EFE, "PP español pide exigir a Cuba libertad de 134 presos políticos", *Diario las Américas*, 1 mayo 2007.

⁵⁸ EFE, "Dirigente socialista dice Gobierno mantendrá el diálogo con los disidentes", 2 mayo 2007.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ 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

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 Cuban authorities, even though Havana confirmed its rejection of collective cooperation.⁶¹ The EU-U.S. summit held in Washington included a brief reference of support to the Cuban people and human rights.⁶²

However, keener analysts reminded the drafters of simplistic explanations based solely on trade and investment arguments and 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 majority 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 to recover property.⁶³ There must be a more credible motivation – the feeling that Spain was losing 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, "cheered 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 EU-debate twice a year."⁶⁴

Spain decided instead to lead the pack of those who, for lack of means or influence, consider that the best strategy is to exploit the holes and windows of opportunity that the Cuban system permits. The "bilateralization" method has prevailed over the precarious "multilaterality". For these reasons, the diverse lines of culture, development cooperation and the political dialogue with the 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 and 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

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.

⁶¹ Andreu Missé. "Bruselas afirma que la visita no contradice UE". El País, 3 mayo 2007.

⁶² Declaration, May 1, 2007. AFP, "Aluden a Cuba en cumbre EEUU y UE", El Nuevo Herald, 1 mayo 2007.

⁶³ Phil Peters, "Eight months and counting", Cuba Policy Report, April 17, 2007.

⁶⁴ Peters, *ibid.*

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 swimming pool... that it was half empty. Then, the Cuban government may or may not provide the necessary water.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ U.S. sources remained skeptical.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ No reference was made to his health, declared a “state secret” by the government, since the announcement of his illness in August 2006.⁷⁰ Castro's absence prompted comments regarding his weak condition, taken into account the importance of the occasion.⁷¹

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.⁷² 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.

An expected new EU disappointment?

When the end of the first semester of the European Union calendar was approaching in June, 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

⁶⁵ EU sources.

⁶⁶ Granma, “Reciben Fidel y Raúl a delegación china de alto nivel” 21 abril 2007.

⁶⁷ EFE, “Preparan actos por el primero de Mayo”, Diario las Américas, 29 abril 2007.

⁶⁸ Pablo Bachelet, “U.S. doubts full recovery”, The Miami Herald, April 25, 2007

⁶⁹ “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.

⁷⁰ EFE, “Raúl Castro, y no Fidel” preside las celebraciones”, El País, 1 mayo 2007.

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² Frances Robles, “Raúl's reforms put on hold”, The Miami Herald, May 2, 2007.

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 and 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 hijackers). Spain and other member states were pressuring for the permanent suspension on the grounds that were in fact not implemented and they had become a cause of irritation for the Cuban regime.⁷³ Opposing members and sectors of the dissident movement were advocating for the re-imposition of the measures.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷ In closing, the EU offered the Cuban government to send a special delegation to Brussels to discuss all matters of mutual concern.⁷⁸ At the same time, the Spanish government invited the Cuban dissident community resident in Madrid to a meeting for explaining the current policy.⁷⁹

⁷³ EFE, “Europa estudia eliminar sanciones”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 9 junio 2007.

⁷⁴ EFE, “Piden a Europa que restablezca sanciones”, *El Nuevo Herald*, 8 junio 2007.

⁷⁵ Debate 21, “De la Vega dice que Estados Unidos tiene que comprender”, 5 junio 2007.

⁷⁶ From EU circles and EU member states sources.

⁷⁷ Council of the European Union, *EU Policy on Cuba*, 15 June 2007. See text in Appendix #4.

⁷⁸ 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.

⁷⁹ EFE, *La Vanguardia*, “Exteriores convoca a la disidencia cuxubana”, 17 junio 2007.

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 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 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 on 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 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 viewed 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 meet, the pending 17th re-evaluation of the Common Position will be executed in June 2008.⁸⁰

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 with the media and other actors. To start with, government officers are advised to take into account that the consensus was a successful serious initial agreement. The EU would strengthen its future position by showing a sign of unity (which would loose leverage by a display of in-fighting). A reopening of the complex text meant the risk of destroying the agreement. With the invitation of the EU to meet the Cuban government, the ball was in Cuba's court.⁸¹

Most media observers in Spain greeted the solution as the best among the possible outcomes, given the circumstances.⁸² 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.⁸³ The crowning to this was in the form of a column published by Fidel Castro in his series of articles in the newspaper *Granma*.⁸⁴ Harsh words were similar to the speech made in the 50th anniversary of the attack to the Moncada Barracks in 2003, when Castro responded to the imposition of the restrictive measures. He then qualified what he called "sanctions" as "unenforceable and unsustainable". He labeled the Common Position a draft written by the State Department and the Czech policy as "U.S. peons". The conclusions of the EU Council were labeled as "calumnious" activity in the "internal affairs of Cuba". In sum, the EU is acting with a "persisting and humiliating subordination to the United States", as illustrated by "the EU questioning at the U.S.-EU summit". It is then "up to the EU to make corrections in its policy towards Cuba". He also regretted the naming of British former Prime Minister Tony Blair as representative for the Middle East peace process, and he pointed out the "demoralizing state of the EU" over the difficulties to agree on a "constitutional" treaty. Cuban diplomats offered to explain or "translate" these otherwise clear statements to EU officers, a move that was politely considered as useless.⁸⁵ The EU establishment knows very well that the apparently solid Cuban

⁸⁰ From EU Council reports and documentation.

⁸¹ From EU reports and documents.

⁸² La Vanguardia, "Cuba, España y la UE", 21 junio 2007; El País, "Diálogo con Cuba", 19 junio 2007.

⁸³ 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, transcribed in Appendix # 5. .

⁸⁴ 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>. Transcribed as Appendix #5.

⁸⁵ From EU sources.

front hides behind different levels of “hardness”. The most moderate, predicted by Brussels (as well as Madrid and other European capitals) as reliable interlocutors in the transition, are not the most vocal now.⁸⁶

As predicted by most keen observers, and sincerely expected in private by government officials and EU staff, the Cuban response sent back the situation to what it was when Spain made the bold move of an opening towards Havana. In addition, Cuba received a combination of good and bad news. On the one hand, the Cuban government was reprimanded by a resolution taken by the European Parliament, in a plenary session attended by only 73 of its 785 members.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the United Nations Human Rights Council decided to discontinue the position of the special rapporteur on Cuba, relieving the Cuban regime of the pressure for investigating abuses to its own citizens.⁸⁸ In spite of the expected triumphant interpretations in the Cuban press⁸⁹, EU circles explained that the rapporteur position was discontinued as part of a political deal to obtain consensus. However, the potential of introducing single resolutions remains open, with the requirement of getting substantial support (at least 15 countries). There is also the possibility of reintroducing a new special rapporteur, an unlikely prospect in the case of Cuba. Nonetheless, Cuba hasn't avoided the monitoring per se.⁹⁰

In view of this international background, the Spanish perception of Cuba's economy is that it has ostensibly deteriorated in recent months, raising serious concerns over the viability of the success of the Raúl Castro's government in providing the necessary resources and reforms to make the living conditions of ordinary Cubans more passable. The reality shows that most Cubans barely can cover their basic needs for a half-month in their current salaries. Tourism services converted sometime ago as a solution to fill the vacuum left by the disappearing of Soviet subsidies, have deteriorated in quality, causing a decrease in the number (16% less in 2006 over 2005) of visitors, with the result of a 50% occupancy in most urban facilities.⁹¹ Fuel charges produced by the increase in world prices have augmented the cost of a trip to Cuba considerably, with the result that a number of Cuban citizens that survived with jobs related to tourism have seen this job opportunity disappear.⁹² Cuba has a debt with Spain in the amount of €1,703 million, or about 17.82% of the total external debt owed to Madrid. Unpaid loans and other obligations amount to €1,698.81, 51% of the total, a level that experts consider impossible to ever repay.⁹³ This financial panorama has changed the attitude of European investors and diplomats towards serious concern over the immediate prospects of Cuban society, without the implementation of some drastic changes by the government, a prospect that, a year after the temporary cession of power by Castro, has not been confirmed.

Finally, it is significant to note that the meaning of the EU Common Position of 1996 has been subtly changed 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

⁸⁶ From Spanish sources.

⁸⁷ ABC. “La eurocámara vota hoy si endurece la postura de la UE con Cuba”, 21 junio 2007; R.M. de R, “La Eurocámara supedita el diálogo con Cuba a los derechos humanos”, El País, 22 junio 2007; Europa Press, “El PP califica de ‘fracaso’ del ejecutivo español la resolución emitida por el Parlamento Europeo sobre Cuba”, 21 junio 2007.

⁸⁸ EFE, “Elena Valenciano cree que la decision de la ONU sobre Cuba es ‘razonable’”, 20 junio; Prensa Latina, “Destaca cancillería cubana victoria en Consejo Derechos Humanos”, 19 junio 2007.

⁸⁹ See Prensa Latina, “Destaca cancillería cubana victoria en Consejo de Derechos Humanos”, Granma, June 19, 2005.

⁹⁰ From EU and member states sources.

⁹¹ It is not surprising then that very attractive travel offers are inserted in major newspapers, advertising 9-day stays (including air fare) for less than €1,400 in 4-5 star hotels in Havana and the Cuban keys.

⁹² Mauricio Vicent, “Cuba toca fondo”, El País, 14 julio 2007.

⁹³ Source: Spain's Ministry of Economy and Finance. See alarming report in Luis Losada Pescador, “Fidel Castro no paga las facturas”, Epoca, 6 abril 2007.

U.S. government as “sanctions”, an adjective that has been expanded to illustrate the measures taken in 2005. The Cuban government has gladly accepted the term and its spirit. In the background of the discussions over the decision to lift the measures, 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.⁹⁴ EU circles know very well that there is a double language – one destined to deal in private with the European power circles, and another used in public to responding to the orders made in Cuba.

Although it is a cumbersome dimension which is difficult to understand 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 actually be 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” of legal acts as the Common Position in the EU, as a unique case of “constructive abstention” which makes it possible to reach difficult deals within the EU structure. In contrast, something the Cuban authorities apparently do not want to accept, is that 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 are “permanently” dead, called “zombies” in EU corridors, and void of any impact.⁹⁵

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 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. This then explains the decision of Spain to lead a change in the approach (but not in the policy).⁹⁶

In this respect, some analysts judge that the Cuban regime actually is not 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, and blaming them for the economic shortcomings of the Cuban system. It needs to be stressed that, 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”.

Conclusion

In any event, at the end of the road, when the transition gets in motion, but not before, the moment of truth will have come to see what kind of new influence Spain and the EU partners who 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

⁹⁴ From EU sources and European media in Brussels.

⁹⁵ From EU legal services sources.

⁹⁶ From Spanish government sources.

drastically the current official position and the re-imposition of the temporary measures, unless Cuba makes a reckless move by expanding the arrest pattern.

So, unless the PSOE is defeated in the elections of 2008 and the PP retakes an aggressive policy towards Cuba and then redesigns the status quo in the EU setting, no further drastic changes are expected. But then Cuba might be immersed in the path towards a real transition - or it may not.⁹⁷ Only then, provisional or final judgment on the EU and the Spanish policy of “constructive engagement”⁹⁸ towards Cuba will be rendered and dutifully evaluated.

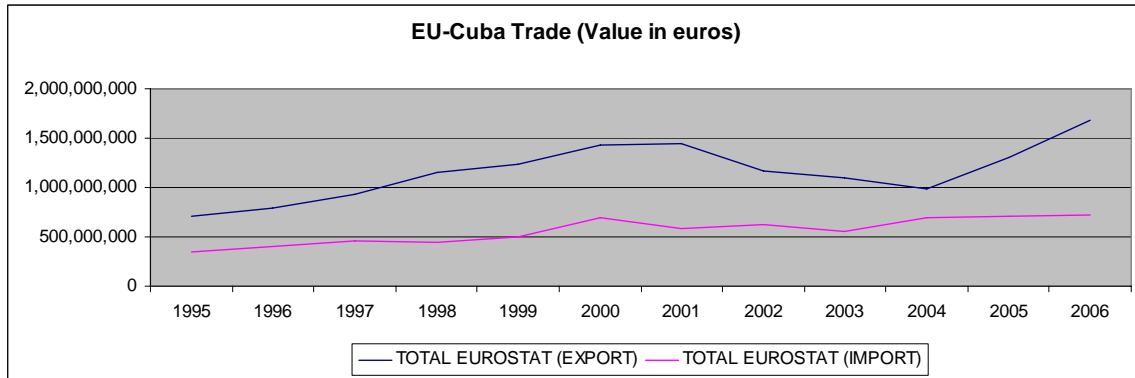
⁹⁷ For a review of the past of the Cuban regime and a speculation about its future, see: Jorge Domínguez, Cuba hoy: analizando su pasado, imaginando su futuro. (Madrid: Colibrí, 2006).

⁹⁸ For a comparative, comprehensive review of this approach to deal with difficult regimes, see: Miroslaw Nincic, “The logic of Positive Engagement: Dealing with Renegade Regimes”, *International Studies Perspectives*, 2006, 7, 321-341.

Appendixes

Appendix #1.

European Union-Cuba Trade (1995-2006)

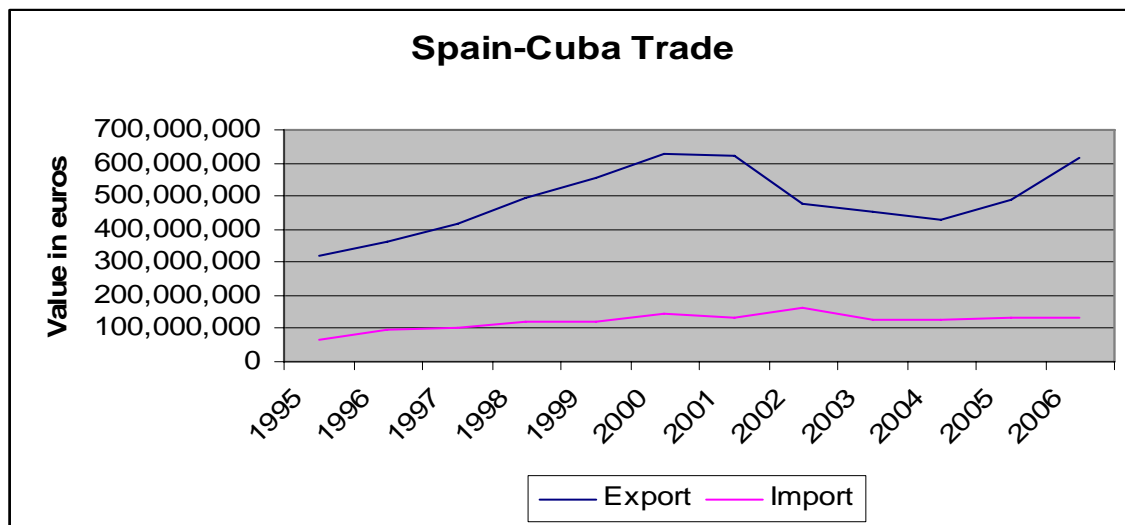


Source: Own elaboration from Eurostat data

Appendix #2

Spain-Cuba Trade (1995-2006). Figures

	Exports	Import
1995	317,724,383	67,511,486
1996	364,998,347	94,159,783
1997	418,209,241	103,576,059
1998	495,528,033	119,177,900
1999	554,974,011	118,417,648
2000	629,251,920	143,079,580
2001	623,743,110	133,169,364
2002	475,385,689	160,250,588
2003	453,903,022	127,057,815
2004	430,297,599	124,486,237
2005	485,959,609	131,737,788
2006	617,273,695	132,636,360



Source: Own elaboration, from EU data

Appendix #3.

Cuba external debt.

Creditors (by country)	Debts (in U.S. dollars)
Venezuela (in bn)	5,970
Japan (in bn)	2,229
Spain (in bn)	1,974
Argentina (in bn)	1,967
China (in bn)	1,770
France (in bn)	1,468
Russia (post Soviet)	819
UK	388
Italy	384
Germany	351
Mexico	325
C. Republic	265
Iran	256
Netherlands	232
Belgium	225
Panama (Colon Free Zone)	200
Canada	99
Vietnam	98
Austria	59
Brazil	40
Trinidad & Tobago	30
Uruguay	30
Sweden	16
Portugal	5
Switzerland	1
Undisclosed Foreign Financing	752
TOTAL (in billions)	19,953

Sources: EU, U.S. and Cuban government sources.

Appendix #4.

EU POLICY ON CUBA

Council conclusions

14 June 2007

1. Although the political, economic and social system in Cuba remains essentially unchanged, the Council has registered the first temporary transfer of power in 48 years from Fidel Castro to a collective leadership led by his brother Raúl Castro which constitutes a new situation.

The Council urges the Cuban Government to undertake the necessary political and economic reforms for improving the daily life of the Cuban people.

2. The EU is following political developments in Cuba, including the human rights situation, very closely. The Council deplores that the human rights situation has not fundamentally changed, despite a decrease in the number of political prisoners and acts of harassment. The Cuban Government continues to deny its citizens internationally recognized civil, political and economic rights and freedoms. The EU once again urges the Cuban Government, also in Cuba's capacity as a member of the Human Rights Council, to release unconditionally all political prisoners, and reaffirms that this issue constitutes a key priority in its policy towards Cuba.

The EU also reiterates its call on the Cuban Government to grant freedom of information and expression and invites the Cuban Government to cooperate on this matter.

3. All those peacefully committed to freedom, democracy and respect for universal human rights may be assured of the solidarity and continued support of the EU. The EU will continue to pursue its dialogue with Cuba's civil society and to offer to all sectors of society practical support towards peaceful change in Cuba. In this context, the Council stresses the EU's worldwide policy of support to Human Rights Defenders according to the respective EU Guidelines.

4. The EU recognizes the right of the Cuban citizens to decide independently about their future and remains ready to contribute positively to the future development of all sectors of Cuban society, including through development cooperation instruments.

5. While equally maintaining its intensive dialogue with civil society and the peaceful opposition, the EU would be ready to resume a comprehensive and open political dialogue with the Cuban authorities on all topics of mutual interest. This dialogue should include the whole range of potential fields of co-operation, including in the political, human rights, economic, scientific and cultural spheres. It should take place on a reciprocal and non-discriminatory basis. In the context of this dialogue, the EU will outline to the Cuban Government its views on democracy, universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. For sounding out this, a Cuban delegation will be invited to Brussels.

Appendix #5

It is the European Union that must rectify errors committed against Cuba

• Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on conclusions reached by the European Union's External Relations Council regarding Cuba

The European Union's Council of Foreign Ministers adopted several decisions on June 18 regarding Cuba.

A document published by the European Union (EU) titled "Conclusions on Cuba" contains a proposal for "comprehensive and open political dialogue with the Cuban authorities on all topics of mutual interest," which the Cuban Foreign Minister has noted, considering it a much-needed rectification.

However, the abovementioned document does not refer to the so-called sanctions that the EU attempted to impose on Cuba, unjustly and rashly, in 2003 and which for two years, out of arrogance, it maintains as "suspended" only.

With Cuba, the only dialogue possible is one between sovereign and equal parties, without any conditions or pending threats. If the EU wants a dialogue with Cuba, it must completely eliminate those sanctions, which have been inapplicable and unsustainable.

The "Conclusions" also do not mention the so-called "Common Position" reached hastily by the financial ministers of the EU in 1996, under pressure by Aznar and based on a draft written in the U.S. State Department.

After so many errors and failures, the only obvious conclusion the EU should reach is that its so-called "Common Position" should disappear, because there neither was nor is any reason whatsoever for its existence, and because it is an obstacle to normal, mutually respectful relations of common interest with our country.

It should be acknowledged that a group of influential European nations has made efforts to change this ridiculous situation. Others, like the Czech Republic, have devoted themselves to being U.S. peons on the European map.

In addition, the "Council Conclusions" meddle, in a slanderous way, in strictly internal Cuban affairs; they issue judgments and announce interventionist and hypocritical actions that Cuba considers to be offensive and unacceptable and rejects energetically.

We do not recognize any moral authority whatsoever on the part of the European Union to judge or advise Cuba.

If, in alluding to President Fidel Castro's temporary delegation of duties to comrade Raúl Castro and calling it "a new situation," they are expressing the illusion that contradictions

or differences exist between the Revolution's leaders or that Cuba's revolutionaries are divided, they are wrong again. The Revolution is more solid and more united than ever.

Our country has risked its very existence; it has waged heroic resistance and has fought tirelessly for more than a century to defend its independence. Cuba is an independent and sovereign country, and the European Union is mistaken if it thinks that it can treat Cuba in any way other than as an equal.

The European Union has shown persistent and humiliating subordination to the United States, rendering it incapable of holding positions based on European interests and making it an accomplice — though it says otherwise — to the criminal and inhumane blockade imposed by that country on the Cuban people, something about which the "Conclusions" does not dare to say a single word. In a statement from the summit it held in April with the United States, the European Union bowed down, questioning Cuba and accepting a motion that gave legitimacy to the "Bush Plan." Its secret meetings with messengers from the empire are well-known, including with the illegitimate administrator appointed for Cuba by the United States, and its officials are often present in anti-Cuban events in Miami or held in Europe but budgeted in Washington.

The European Union is shamefully hypocritical when it unjustly addresses Cuba but remains silent about the torture carried out by the United States on its illegal naval base in Guantánamo, which usurps Cuban territory, and Abu Ghraib, which is even used against European citizens. It remains silent, with impunity, about the kidnappings of individuals by the U.S. special services in third countries, and it has provided its territory for collaborating with secret CIA flights and for sheltering illegal prisons. It has not said anything either about the dozens of people who have disappeared under those circumstances, nor about the hundreds of thousands of civilians murdered in Iraq.

It is the European Union that must rectify errors committed against Cuba. Every step in the right direction will be appropriately welcomed. But there is no hurry: we have all the time in the world.

Havana, June 22, 2007

Appendix #6

Reflections of President Fidel Castro

An honorable response

EVENTS follow each other at an incredible pace. Sometimes, several occur simultaneously. Their inherent significance and usefulness as examples is what I wish to, or, better, feel compelled to comment on. I am not referring, today, to what occurred in Geneva, which is considered a well-deserved revolutionary victory for Third World nations. Rather, I shall refer to Cuba's response to the European Council on Foreign Relations, published last Friday, June 22, on Granma's front page.

The statement was a response worthy of our Revolution and its high political leadership. One by one, all points calling for an immediate response from Cuba were addressed and clarified. Allow me to enumerate and go over them again:

"A dialogue between sovereign and equal partners, devoid of any conditions or impending threats, is the only possible dialogue with Cuba. If the European Union wishes to engage in any form of dialogue with Cuba, it must definitively eliminate those sanctions, which have since proved impracticable and unsustainable".

"The 'Conclusions' also failed to mention the so-called 'Common Position', hastily agreed upon by EU Ministers of Finance in 1996 under pressures from Aznar and on the basis of a draft drawn up by the US State Department".

"After so many mistakes and failures, the only obvious conclusion that the European Union should fittingly draw is that the so-called 'Common Position' must disappear, since there were and there are no reasons whatsoever for its existence and because it hinders any normal, mutually respectful relationship of common interest with our country".

"A group of influential European nations have tried to change this ludicrous situation. Others, such as the Czech Republic, have confirmed to be American pawns on the European map. The 'Conclusions of the Council' slanderously meddle in matters that are of Cuba's strict concern, pass judgment and announce intrusive and hypocritical actions that Cuba regards as offensive and unacceptable and strongly repudiates".

"Cuba is an independent and sovereign country and the European Union is wrong if it believes it can treat it as anything other than an equal".

"The European Union has shown persistent and humiliating subordination to the United States, of a kind that renders it incapable of holding positions based on European interests and turns it into an accomplice, despite all talk to the contrary, to the criminal and inhuman blockade that the US imposes on the Cuban people, and about which the 'Conclusions' did not even dare say a single word".

“In the European Union Summit with the United States last April, it stooped to questioning Cuba and accepted a reference that acknowledges the legitimacy of the “Bush Plan.” Known are its collusion with the Empire's envoys and even with the spurious inspector for Cuba appointed by the United States”.

“The European Union is shamelessly hypocritical when it unjustly points its finger at Cuba while it remains silent about acts of US-coordinated torture at the illegal Guantánamo Naval Base, which encroaches upon Cuban territory, and at Abu Ghraib, where these are even administered to European citizens”.

“It impudently remains silent about kidnappings by US Special Forces in third countries and has offered its territory to cooperate with the CIA's secret flights and to harbor illegal prisons. Nor has it said anything about the hundreds of persons who have disappeared as a result of these actions or about the hundreds of thousands of civilians murdered in Iraq”.

“It is the European Union which must rectify the mistakes it has made with respect to Cuba”.

At the risk of turning this into an extensive reflection, I wish to add a number of facts. The European Union has been led by Washington to a mighty cul-de-sac. The Cold War ended with the triumph of the real consumerism of developed capitalism, and the frantic impulse to consume that had been awakened in broad sectors of the populations of the socialist block and Soviet Union. They had lost the battle of ideas. The Russian people, the main moving force behind the October Revolution, were violently deprived of important commitments which encompassed agreements and guarantees for its security and sovereignty: Europe was stripped of over 400 SS-20 missiles, as NATO described them. These mobile missiles, fitted with three nuclear warheads each, were pointed to every corner in Europe where US military bases and NATO forces were located. In its triumphalist intoxication, the aggressive military alliance had taken under its wing many former socialist republics of Europe, a number of which, seeking economic benefits, have made the rest of Europe a hostage of their foreign policy, which unconditionally serves the strategic interests of the United States.

All European Union members have the right to veto a decision. This system is politically dysfunctional and curtails, in practice, the sovereignty of all members. The European Union is today in worse shape than the former socialist block ever was. The vain Tony Blair, manufacturer of sophisticated submarines and a friend of Bush, is already being announced as a potential future candidate to chair the European Union. The cables bring the news today that he was appointed special envoy for the Middle East, where he so amply contributed to that disastrous war unleashed by the United States.

In the energy sector, we see European governments beg for oil in the few regions in the world where the empire has not forcibly appropriated this resource, in much the same way it purchases, with worthless bills, any European company it pleases.

The euro, however, is a stable currency, much more than the dollar, which is constantly being devalued. Even though the dollar is defended by the holders of US bonds and bills, the empire faces the risk of an economic disaster of dramatic repercussions.

Europe, on the other hand, would be one of the areas most severely affected by global warming. Its well-known and modern port facilities would end up underwater.

Today, it desperately proposes free trade agreements with Latin America which are worse than Washington's, in search of raw materials and bio-diesel. We are beginning to hear criticisms about this. But Europe's money is not in the hands of the Community, it belongs to transnational corporations which may relocate to countries where labor is cheap in search of profits.

Cuba's proud and honorable response has underscored the essentials.

Though every good strategy includes a good tactic, neither of the two are sound if arrogance and smugness are tolerated.

Europeans themselves will one day come to understand the absurd situation they were led to by imperialism and will realize that a Caribbean country pointed out some necessary truths for them. The wild horse of consumerism cannot continue to gallop madly ahead, for such a race is unsustainable.

The last European Union meeting held to address the future community treaty was further proof of the demoralization of Europe. Last Sunday, June 24, the AFP reported that Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi expressed his "bitterness" over the Brussels summit, where he accused European Union leaders of staging the spectacle of an emotionless Europe, in an interview for La Repubblica newspaper.

"As a European, allow me to be embittered for the spectacle I find myself in front of", Prodi, ex-chairman of the European Commission, said.

"The doggedness of some governments to negate every emotional aspect of Europe has hurt me", he added, referring to Poland, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Great Britain.

"And then these are the same governments that rebuke Europe for being far from citizens", he affirmed. "But how can you involve citizens without involving their emotions? How can you give them pride to be European if the symbols of its pride [such as the flag and hymn] are negated?" he asked.

"Prodi lambasted [Tony Blair] for 'conducting a battle' against the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights".

"He criticized Polish President Lech Kaczynski, who said he could not share his stances because Italy and Poland were 'very different nations'".

"Prodi concluded by saying that 'never before had Eurosceptics expressed themselves so explicitly and programmatically' as in the last Summit".

At the last G-8 meeting, Bush had sent Europeans a chilly message.

At this decisive point in time, the number of enemies one has, which will be fewer and fewer with time, is of no importance. What is important is “the stars we carry on our foreheads.”

Fidel Castro Ruz

June 27, 2007