

**From Stubbornness and Mutual Irrelevance  
to Stillness and Vigil on Castro's Crisis: The  
Current State of European Union-Spain-  
Cuba Relations**

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## From Stubbornness and Mutual Irrelevance to Stillness and Vigil on Castro's Crisis: The Current State of European Union-Spain-Cuba Relations<sup>1</sup>

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**Summary:** By mid-2006, for the first time in almost half a century, all actors and observers of the Cuban drama that has attracted the attention of a wide spectrum of the world's public opinion were in agreement. All breathed a sort of a mix of expectation, calm, anguish, and hope in front of the moderately imminent biological ending of at least the current political leadership. What it was less clear then and it is less clear now, of course, is the doubt consisting in deciphering if this chapter of the recent history of Cuba will also represent a drastic change of regimeXXXXX

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

By mid-2006, for the first time in almost half a century, all actors and observers of the Cuban drama that has attracted the attention of a wide spectrum of the world's public opinion were in agreement. All breathed a sort of a mix of expectation, calm, anguish, and hope in front of the moderately imminent biological (as the term is customarily used in Cuba) ending of at least the current political leadership. What was not actually expected

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is a follow-up to several articles, reports and book chapters published in recent years: 'Cuba: motivaciones y perspectivas de una extrema tensión', ARI, Elcano Royal Institute, April 2003, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/274.asp>; 'The European Perception of Cuba: from Frustration to Irritation', Working Paper, Institut Universitari d'Estudis Europeus, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2003, [http://selene.uab.es/cs\\_iuee/english/obs/m\\_working.html](http://selene.uab.es/cs_iuee/english/obs/m_working.html); <http://www.miami.edu/eucenter/royfinal.pdf>; 'The European Perception of Cuba: from Frustration to Irritation', update of previous entry, Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), Background Briefing, September 2003, [http://www.focal.ca/images/pdf/Cuba\\_EU.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/images/pdf/Cuba_EU.pdf); 'Cuba: Between the United States and Europe', *Cuba Today*, National Policy Association Bulletin, Washington DC, vol. 3, nr 2, October 2002, p. 1-4; 'The European Anchoring of Cuba: from Persuasion and Good Intentions to Contradiction and Frustration', Miami European Union Center/Jean Monnet Chair, vol. 2, nr 6, May 2002, [http://www.miami.edu/EUcenter/royworkingpaper\\_cuba.pdf](http://www.miami.edu/EUcenter/royworkingpaper_cuba.pdf); 'The European Union and Cuba in the aftermath of Castro's "fall"', occasional paper, Miami European Union Center/Jean Monnet Chair, vol. 10, nr 14, October 2004, <http://www.miami.edu/eucenter/roycubafinal.pdf>; 'Confrontación, irritación y desilusión: balance de las relaciones entre la Unión Europea y Cuba', ARI, Elcano Royal Institute, November 2004, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/605.asp>; 'The European Union-Cuba relationship: more of the same?', *FOCAL Point: Spotlight on the Americas*, January 2005, vol.4, nr 2, p. 6-7, [http://www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint\\_feb05.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint_feb05.pdf); 'Cuba and the European Union: Chronicle of a Dead Agreement Foretold', *Redifining Cuban Foreign Policy: the Impact of the 'Special Period'*, Michael Erisman and John Kirk (eds.), University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 2006, p. 98-120. While this update has to be read in the context of EU-Cuba relations since the early 1990s, it deals almost exclusively with the developments from mid 2003 to mid 2006.

was that the vigil was going to end so suddenly and not exactly for the terminal reason (the death of Castro) that most feared or hoped for. What it was less clear then and it is less clear now, of course, is the doubt consisting in deciphering if this chapter of the recent history of Cuba will also represent a drastic change of regime. In other words, the ultimate questions was not only 'and now, what?' What was demanded was to know if all the uncertainty created by Castro's illness was going to end in a succession or a transition. In this context, each sector, actor and observer has performed according to individual or group needs and desires.

Although most observers would agree that something important was commencing to develop in Cuba in mid 2006, differences in analysis and political views rested basically on the fact if this change to come was going to be a succession or a transition. In other words, on the one hand, the bets were off for either predicting a synchronized change in the leadership according to the legislation in place, with Raúl Castro taking over the powers bestowed by his brother Fidel, or for a transitory outcome. The alternative contemplated was to be a brief interlude in the direction of a true transition to a different kind of political regime.

According to numerous signals coming from Havana, all the pieces in the puzzle seemed to be prepared ('atado y bien atado', tied up and well tied up, as the official saying went on during the last years of the Franco regime) for the effective Cuban succession, even when now no one seemed to know if that plan would lead to a provisional leadership by Raúl Castro, as it was in fact announced when the sudden illness and surgery of Fidel Castro were announced and then his brother took his temporary place. The alternative, a collective power wielded by the party, was on the horizon.

In any case, in the context of EU-Cuba relations, the prevalent atmosphere was in a state of stillness.<sup>3</sup> The United States and the anti-Castro interests were engaging in another cyclical round of hardening of the economic and political measures against Cuba that were initiated by the embargo imposed as a retaliation for the expropriations executed in the early days of the Cuban revolution. Meanwhile, diverse European Union collective interests and individual governments seemed to be inexorably coming to the conclusion, with some sense of realistic resignation, that their efforts for a long policy of constructive engagement with the Cuban regime and the society at large were not receiving the expected results. 'Welcome to the club', was the collective assessment in Washington and European capitals.

However, while the US-Cuba confrontation appeared to be characterized by another variation of the old-fashioned Cold War methods (at least in its verbal and show business appearances), the European-Cuban relationship were tinged by a peculiar and special touch of admirable stubbornness, as definite as the attitude expressed by the United States and Cuba to each other for over four decades. The difference this time was that the Europe-Cuba relationship was doomed for frustration, not by a sentiment of irritation from the part of the European Union at the hardening of the human rights behavior executed by Castro, but by a sense of 'mutual irrelevancy'<sup>4</sup> that apparently characterized both strategies (if one can label the European and Cuban attitudes as such).

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<sup>3</sup> The official assessment of Cuba-EU relations is succinctly exposed in the documentation provided by the DG-Development of the European Commission, in charge of the dossier of the relationship with that country. In contrast with all the rest of the Latin American countries (with the exception of the Dominican Republic), whose relationship with the EU is regulated through the DG-External Relations, Cuba, lacking a development cooperation agreement, is still a candidate to be inserted in the ACP network benefiting of the former Lomé Convention and now the Cotonou Agreement, along the other Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic and Haiti. For detailed documentation, see the website (unaltered since 5 August 2005): [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/country/country\\_home\\_en.cfm?cid=cu&status=new](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/country/country_home_en.cfm?cid=cu&status=new)

<sup>4</sup> The author would like to credit an anonymous staff member of an EU institution for this expression, apparently shared by a wide range of actors in the Brussels EU establishment.

Both actors seemed (and still are) to be convinced that they had exhausted all moves to influence each other. Both appeared to be content (or at least placidly resigned) with the evidence that, no matter how much they try (or don't try), there is no chance for an important change in their corresponding behavior. For the European Union this diagnosis does not seem to appear to be negative, because the record shows that Brussels has tried to influence, persuade, and, in a subtle manner, to coerce Havana in a given future political direction, aiming mostly at preparing the country for changes after the end of the current political system. For Cuba, the stalemate has to be read as a triumph, even at the price of not receiving some expected benefits for a mild reform in behavior. Showing that facing the European Union and some powerful European actors has political returns. It is therefore valued at a much higher level than submitting to negotiation and compromise.<sup>5</sup>

This apparently well-set scenario that dominates the European-Cuban relationship when the Castro regime was approaching its fiftieth anniversary and the leader was ready to surpass his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday has developed from a series of trends, events, and tactics that evolved parallel to the more tumultuous, at times dangerous and bordering on war, relationship between the United States and Cuba since 1959. The ups and downs of the European-Cuban link are, to a large extent, collateral damage and appendices of a deeper and more complex relationship between Havana and Washington. For the most part, the European motions towards Cuba have been the result of reactions to the US policy, although some European actors have had a long historical linkage with the Caribbean nation, such is the notorious and special case of Spain.<sup>6</sup> This 'special relationship' is constantly present in the analytical framework of Spanish observers and scholars, with the result that reality and historical facts are filtered through the particular lenses of the direct witnesses and researchers.<sup>7</sup>

This stalemate is aptly illustrated by the evolution of what has to be considered as the most critical confrontation between the European Union and Cuba in decades, leading to

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<sup>5</sup> Of the previous papers and chapters mentioned in note 1, one has to be considered as the most updated regarding this issue, covering until the beginning of the change of course in EU policy in 2004: 'The European Union and Cuba in the aftermath of Castro's "fall"', occasional paper, Miami European Union Center/Jean Monnet Chair, vol. 10, nr 14, October 2004, <http://www.miami.edu/eucenter/roycubafinal.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The following books by this author deal with topics on the relationship between Cuba and Spain. For a selection of my publications on the relationship between Spain and Cuba: *Josep Conangla i Fontanilles, La Constitució de l'Havana i altres escrits*, Edicions de La Magrana/Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1986; *Catalunya a Cuba*, Editorial Barcino/Fundació Jaume I, Barcelona, 1988, preface by Pere Grases; *Cuba y España: relaciones y percepciones*, Biblioteca Cubana Contemporánea, Madrid, 1988; *El espacio iberoamericano: dimensiones y percepciones de la relación especial entre España y América Latina*, with Juan Antonio March, Instituto de Estudios Ibéricos/Centro de Estudios Internacionales, Miami/Barcelona, 1996, (chapter: 'España y Cuba: Una relación muy especial' and 'Posdata'); *The Ibero-American Space: Dimensions and Perceptions of the Special Relationship Between Spain and Latin America*, with Albert Galinsoga (eds.), Iberian Studies Institute, 'Jean Monnet' Chair for European Integration, University of Lleida, 1997 (chapter: 'Spain and Cuba: a very special relationship' and 'Postscript'); *Josep Conangla y Fontanilles. Memorias de mi juventud en Cuba durante la guerra (1895-1898)*, Ediciones Península, Barcelona, 1998, annotated edition and introduction; *La siempre fiel: un siglo de relaciones hispanocubanas (1898-1998)*, Los Libros de la Catarata/Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1999; *Josep Conangla i Fontanilles: Patriarca del nacionalisme català a Cuba*, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona/Tarragona, 1999; *Cuba, the United States and the Helms-Burton Doctrine: International Reactions*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2000, <http://www.upf.com/book.asp?id=ROYXXS00>

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the standard academic literature (see previous papers mentioned in introductory note), some unusual pieces of direct Spanish witnesses of the recent Cuban developments are worth consideration. Among them, not only for its content, but because it follows in a diary method a chronological order of the period studied in this monograph, see the book authored by former TVE correspondent in Havana, José Manuel Martín Medem, *¿Por qué no me enseñaste cómo se vive sin ti?* (El Viejo Topo, Madrid, 2005). Although it deals with events of the period previous to the term of this paper, it is advisable to review the commentaries made by Martín Medem's predecessor in Havana, Vicenç Sanclemente, in his book entitled *La Habana no es una isla: crónica de un corresponsal en Cuba* (Jaque Mate, Barcelona, 2002). For a critical evaluation of the fascination generated by Cuba on the minds of the Spanish intellectuals, see the article by Antonio Elorza, 'Cuba desde España: el espejismo', *Letras Libres*, September 2004, <http://www.lettraslibres.com/index.php?art=9889>

a softening of the attitudes and offerings on the part of the EU, with no evidential results and rewards given by the Cuban regime. Far from resorting to the battle lines, both sides seemed to have preferred to agree on a *modus vivendi*<sup>8</sup> that, while it does not satisfy anybody, it serves at least as a platform for not to worsen the situation.

The series of moves started with a deep consideration that the temporary measures taken by the EU in mid 2003, as a retaliation for acts considered as violation of human rights executed by the Cuban regime, were delivering counterproductive results which did not benefit anybody, possibly with the exception of the satisfaction of hardliners in the Cuban exile community and the US government. By expecting the Cuban regime to submit to the persuasion first and then to the punishment for unbecoming behavior, the European diplomatic machinery was shut off and became ineffective in minimally acting in support of the dissident movement it meant to benefit. Brussels saw that it became the victim of the same symptom that has affected the US interests through the 40-plus years of the embargo and isolation policy.

## 2. Change of Course: Back to 'Constructive Engagement'

Not convinced that a change of policy would render the expected results, the European Union decided in mid 2004, less than a year after the imposition of temporary measures (known as 'sanctions' by outsiders, but a term never used in the EU context), to suspend them and revert the official attitude to the basic three-fold strategy in existence since the mid 1990s when the EU adopted the Common Position on Cuba. First, it stated disagreement with the political and economic system of Cuba. However, the EU expressed opposition to the US embargo, and most especially to its collateral measures regarding potential retaliation against outside interests dealing with Cuba. Finally, it conditioned an improvement of the EU-Cuba relationship and the expected benefit derived from programs of development cooperation to the implementation of a substantial reform in the Cuban legal and political system and a policy of respect for human rights.

This scene has to be properly framed within the context of the first stormy part of 1996 when the prospects of a rapprochement between the European Union and the United States were optimistic. Simultaneously the troubles for the passing of the Helms-Burton act<sup>9</sup> (aimed at punishing European investment in Cuba) ended abruptly when Castro ordered on 24 February 1996, the criminal shot down of two Brothers to the Rescue airplanes that recklessly had been overflying Cuban territory.<sup>10</sup> In the fall, after the victory of the Popular Party led by José María Aznar, the new Spanish government took the lead in the EU and managed to get the Common Position approved, a first imposed on any other country. Reinforced by the measures ('sanctions') in 2003, this time the EU decided to get rid of them and then deal with the approach to be taken with the dissident movement and official participation in events taking place in Cuba for the sake of strengthening the communication with the Cuban government and society at large.

The preparations for this mild reform of the official attitude commenced in mid 2004. Although the topic was largely discussed and debated during the previous months, the change of government in Spain as a result of the March 14 election (linked to the 11

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<sup>8</sup> This expression was at times in the past applied to the Spain-Cuba political and economic relationship during the first part of the Castro regime, while Franco was in charge of Spain. Observers of the current EU-Cuba relationship have recently adopted it in an unofficial fashion.

<sup>9</sup> Neutered by an escape clause given to the President and an agreement made with the EU, its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary passed without fanfare on 12 March 2006. Meanwhile, numerous details of the airplane attack are still covered by mystery: Ariel Remos, 'Sin resolver el asesinato de Hermanos al Rescate', *Diario las Américas*, 22/II/2006.

<sup>10</sup> For a complete analysis of the genesis and evolution of this legislation, see my book: *Cuba, the United States and the Helms-Burton Doctrine: International Reactions*, *op. cit.*

March terrorist attack in Madrid) was also a deciding factor. Madrid took the lead in persuading the rest of the EU governments to consider a correction for a situation that was, according to the evaluation of the core of EU Council members, counterproductive and not to the benefit of the Cuban civil society, while diplomatic channels remained frozen.

The Irish presidency of the EU Council ended in June 2004 with no noticeable changes. Several sectors of the EU institutions continued stressing the need to follow the official script and proceeded with campaigns to influence and to pressure the Cuban government. Such is the notorious case of Swedish EU Parliament Member Cecilia Malstrom, who has been a leader of the critical sector opposed to any amelioration of the measures taken in 2003.<sup>11</sup> As referred later on this commentary, Malstrom's activity was to resurface later on when the EU changed course.

As a sign of an unchanged situation, on 13 May 2004, the Presidency of the EU issued a Declaration reaffirming its condemnation for the trials of dissidents in Havana, recalling the Resolution adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights of 15 April 2004, reminding Havana that the situation was to be weighed when the evaluation the Common Position was due.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, on 14 June 2004, at the closing of the Irish leadership of the EU, the General Affairs Council issued its assessment expressing 'disappointing lack of progress' by the Cuban government, and 'serious concern at the ongoing large-scale violation of human rights in Cuba', calling Cuba 'to release immediately all those detained for political reasons'. Among other concerns, the EU expressed 'regret at the imposition of new restrictions on private enterprise', 'condemned the unacceptable attitude of the Cuban government towards EU delegations in Havana', and 'regret at Cuba's refusal of EU cooperation'. As a result 'of the lack of progress... the Council reaffirmed the measures adopted on 5 June 2003'. At the same time, 'in the context of its policy of constructive engagement, the EU and its Member States would also continue to provide support for cultural events in Cuba and would urge the Cuban authorities to avoid obstructing this process'.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the apparent lack of substantial changes in European perceptions, the Spanish lead of the EU's new course of action on Cuba became more assertive when on 9 July 2004, Madrid named the new ambassador. Carlos Alonso Zaldívar, a career diplomat with previous experience in Korea and Rome, was named and confirmed, giving the Castro government a sense of priority when the Spanish government announced earlier that three important posts were designated for the initial changes. The other two were the UN and Morocco embassies. Simultaneously, Herick Campos, PSOE deputy and Secretary General of the Socialist Youth, visited Havana, with the result that the Partido Popular retaliated by sending its Secretary for International Relations Jorge Moragas to Cuba to visit Oswaldo Payá. Days after, the Cuban authorities released the only woman among the 75 arrested dissidents, Martha Beatriz Roque.<sup>14</sup>

The plans for a reformatting of the EU policy proceeded and news of the impending change were met by the Spanish opposition with certain measures to influence the discussions taking place in Brussels. The Spanish embassy prepared the way intending to use the reception of the national day of 12 October for announcing the new plan, with considerable criticism from sectors of the dissident movement and the Cuban exile community.<sup>15</sup> In this contextual framework, in another of the serious incidents that could

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Cuba's ambassador to the EU, 20/III/2003.

<sup>12</sup> Declaration, 13/V/2004.

<sup>13</sup> Council of the European Union, General Affairs and External Relations, 14/VI/2004, 10189 (Presse 195).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of this episode, see my paper entitled 'The European Union and Cuba in the aftermath of Castro's "fall"', *op. cit.*, and Martín Medem, p. 222-225.

<sup>15</sup> Roy, *ibid*, p. 7; Martín Medem, p. 240-246.

have had important consequences, Jorge de Moragas traveled again to Havana on a tourist visa. He was accompanied by two Dutch deputies, while the Netherlands had the EU presidency. Moragas intended to meet with representatives of the dissident movement and he was detained at the airport and forced to go back on the same Air France airplane he had taken. The Spanish government presented a protest to the Cuban authorities, and the incident caused considerable trouble to the Spanish embassy while it was preparing the ground for the change of policy.<sup>16</sup> This incident was strategically located just before the Latin American Committee of the EU (COLAT) was to meet to discuss the Cuban issue, with the result that the debate was postponed for later in November, giving time to the European embassies to assess the situation.<sup>17</sup>

In what was to be one of the most publicly debated debuts of any Spanish ambassador to Cuba, Zaldívar became the center of the controversy when in the course of the reception for the national day of 12 October, not attended by Cuban officials who had boycotted the occasion, he announced that the Spanish government had decided to take the lead and apply what was going to be the centerpiece of the EU new approach. The new format was not to include invitations to be extended to the representatives of the dissident movement with which the national governments will have separate, periodic meetings.<sup>18</sup> Some dissidents took the measures as pragmatic and others felt insulted and left the reception in disgust, while the Cuban exile community in Miami lambasted the Spanish government.<sup>19</sup>

Days after, news erupted about the fall suffered by Fidel Castro in Santa Clara after leaving the podium and concluding his speech. The incident gave considerable ground for speculation regarding his health.<sup>20</sup> It was to be a precedent widely studied and then on 31 July 2006, news came of his surgical operation and his temporary substitution in power by his brother. In the Spanish context, the accident of Santa Clara produced unusual commentaries from several PP figures. Loyola de Palacio, upon leaving her position of Vice President of the European Commission, said that 'we are all waiting for Castro to die... because it will be the only way to change the situation and democracy to return to Cuba'.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the conservative majority (376 in favor, 281 against, and 26 abstentions) of the EU Parliament approved a resolution to demand the release of all political prisoners in Cuba and the authorization for Oswaldo Payá to travel to Europe to receive the Sajarov Prize awarded to him by the Parliament.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, in the EU-Cuba front the machinery of change was in motion. The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs convoked (in a rather unprecedented move) the Spanish ambassador to announce him the 'unfreezing' of the conflictive relationship that prevented direct communications with European embassies. In spite of all difficulties and obstacles placed by different actors, at the year's closing, it was obvious that the existing policy had exhausted all its available credibility. Brussels and several European governments had given explicit signals to Havana for the need of offering a hint of a gesture that would help the EU to change course.

Consequently, a sort of olive branch was extended by the Cuban government in the form of the release of a dozen political prisoners, among them the prestigious poet and

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<sup>16</sup> Roy, *ibid*, p. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Roy, p. 8-9; Martín Medem, p. 250-253.

<sup>18</sup> Roy, p. 6-7; Martín Medem, p. 242-251.

<sup>19</sup> For a critical assessment of the change of the EU policy under the leadership of the Spanish government and the role played by the new ambassador, see: Antonio Elorza, 'La Unión Europea y Cuba: no habrá final feliz', *Letras Libres*, December 2004, <http://www.letraslibres.com/index.php?sec=13&art=10126>

<sup>20</sup> Roy, *ibid*, p. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Roy, p. 9; Martín Medem, p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> Martín Medem, p. 265.

independent journalist Raúl Rivero and the economist Oscar Espinosa. While this move was limited in number (still the bulk of the 76 imprisoned dissidents remained in jail) and in concept (the 'liberation' was conditioned as *'excarcelación'*, in fact a house exile), EU circles welcomed the improvement, took a positive note and continued to pressure the decision makers of the national governments to match the expectations.<sup>23</sup> While the conservative opposition in Spain evaluated this as a triumph for Castro, the Dutch government as EU presidency judged the decision as 'encouraging'.<sup>24</sup>

The change of the EU presidency had, among other details, resulted in the announcement of the reformatting of the EU attitude. On 31 January, the General Affairs Council issued its conclusions deciding that 'all measures taken on June 5, 2003' were 'temporarily suspended'. This decision was to be reviewed in six months 'in the light of developments towards democratic pluralism and respect for human rights'. In detail, the Council terminated 'the limitation of high-level visits', while meetings 'with peaceful opposition might be part' of such high level visits. It also suspended 'the reduction of the level of participation in cultural events'.<sup>25</sup> As later developments would show, on 13 June 2005, the Council decided 'to maintain the dialogue' and to keep the measures suspended, in spite of the fact that reiterated 'its urgent request to release unconditionally all political prisoners', expressed 'regret at the lack of any further advance since the release' of a number of prisoners, and the fact that it did not detect 'satisfactory progress on human rights'.<sup>26</sup> In essence, the EU had elected to keep on trying to maintain the lines of communication opened, with the result that European circles and interests opposed to this new EU approach branded it 'a policy of appeasement'.<sup>27</sup> However, the semester and its background were not an easy scenario for what appeared to be a notable improvement in EU-Cuba relations.

The Spanish government and EU leaders stressed the need for the change, justifying this move because the imposition of the 'sanctions' did not deliver any positive results,<sup>28</sup> outlining an improvement in the relationship and a noticeable decrease in the tension.<sup>29</sup> In contrast with the optimistic EU assessment, the US government predicted that Cuba would implement an even harsher policy against the dissidents. Some of them, however, considered that the change would not have any effects on their situation. The US press stressed the division of views within the EU regarding the evolution of the Cuba issue.

Divisions, contradictions and paradoxes, added to the complexity, seemed to be part of the overall composite label branded by all sides dealing with the new Cuba-Europe relationship. In essence, things had returned to 'normal'. After a period of freezing when customary feelings between European, and most especially Spanish, personalities and interests of Cuba and Europe again were behaving as expected. When 'normalcy' was hidden behind the impasse caused by the implementation of the special measures, the oddity of inaction took its place. Now things returned to their usual shape. However, some interesting novelties were revealed, as a sign of the new times.

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<sup>23</sup> Markus Merckel *et al.*, 'Las relaciones de la Unión Europea con Cuba', *El País*, 12/XII/2004.

<sup>24</sup> Martín Medem, p. 277.

<sup>25</sup> Press Release, 31/I/2005; Conclusion, Cuba.

<sup>26</sup> Council of the EU, External Relations Council Meeting, 13/VI/2005.

<sup>27</sup> International Society of Human Rights, 15/VI/2005; see also article by Vaclav Havel.

<sup>28</sup> Editorial, *El País*, 14/I/2005.

<sup>29</sup> AFP, 'Embajador español en Cuba cree que las "relaciones bilaterales se están normalizando"', *Diario las Américas*, 25/I/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'O dialogamos con todos o nos tiramos los trastos a cabeza', *El País*, 24/I/2005.

### 3. Enlarging Frequent Miles Accounts

A frenzy of significant transnational travel took the scene of Cuba-EU-Spain-US, relations. To start with, for example, the Cuban exile establishment had split much earlier in this EU-Cuba development. The root of this was the disappearance of the towering figure of Jorge Mas Canosa, founder of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), credited for most of the successes of the exiles in influencing the US policy towards Cuba, along with the passing of the Helms-Burton legislation. Dissatisfied with the evolution of the organization now led by Mas Canosa's son, Jorge Mas Santos, important wealthy members left the organization and founded a rival entity, aiming to fill the place of lobbying US power circles. While the Spanish government avoided meetings with Jorge Mas in Madrid,<sup>30</sup> as a retaliation for making public appearances before his departure expressing the demands he was going to present to the Spanish government, his contribution to a presidential inaugural gala organized by Cuban-American congresspeople was rejected,<sup>31</sup> adding insult to injury. The misfortunes of the CANF leadership worsened when it supported the candidacy of George Bush's rival, John Kerry, in the 2004 election. The CANF apparently recovered part of its international attraction when the crisis of Castro's illness erupted.

On the Cuban front, at times the leadership seemed to lack coordination, although this was most of the time due to the overwhelming protagonism executed by Fidel Castro who, in one of his televised interventions, lambasted the usual enemies (the United States, the exiles) and added... the European Union, just at the moment when the thaw of relations was in motion.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising at the same time that Cuban Foreign Minister Pérez Roque embarked in a well-choreographed, PR-like tour of Europe, including key stopovers in Madrid and Brussels, where he was warmly received by King Juan Carlos and top EU officials. He demanded a treatment for Cuba similar to the one received by other nations. However, not all was free from controversies and certain double-meaning message given by the Spanish government to the Cuban leadership. As will see below, while dissident poet Raúl Rivero was well received upon his liberation by Under Secretary of State Bernardino León and PSOE International Relations Secretary Trinidad Jiménez, Pérez Roque was received, according to strict protocol, by an airline stewardess. In spite of the fact that he was later received by King Juan Carlos, Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero avoided photo opportunities with the Cuban foreign minister. Anonymous Cuban sources then spread the veil threat that Fidel Castro could retaliate by not attending the Ibero-American Summit to be held in Salamanca in the fall.<sup>33</sup> He in fact skipped the gathering because of a combination of factors, as outlined below.

Continuing the long tradition implemented by Spain's regional leaders, Andalusian autonomous president Manuel Chaves (who is significantly the president of the PSOE) inaugurated the new trend of high visibility visits from Europe. He was the first important dignitary to arrive in Havana since the lifting of the temporary measures that banned such trips for 18 months. Not long afterwards the tour taken by Chaves, Raúl Castro, Fidel Castro's brother and heir apparent, visited Galicia, the native land of their father. This highly visible visit caused many polemic commentaries mostly due to the fact that there was no evidence of any critical comment or special demand made by the ultraconservative Galician President Manuel Fraga Iribarne on the Cuban leadership regarding the dissident movement and the expansion of the liberating measures. This friendly and diplomatic pattern was in tune with past experiences by Raúl's host, who

<sup>30</sup> Rui Ferreira, 'Canciller cancela cita', *El Nuevo Herald*, 15/1/2005.

<sup>31</sup> Lesley Clark, 'Gala's snub is no obstacle', *The Miami Herald*, 20/1/2005.

<sup>32</sup> Mar Marín, 'Castro advierte que no necesita a Europa tras giro político UE', *Diario las Américas*, 3/11/2005;

Vanessa Arrington, 'Castro says Cuba doesn't need US', *The Miami Herald*, 3/11/2005.

<sup>33</sup> Juan José Aznárez, 'España mira al poscastrismo', *El País*, 23/11/2005.

spent part of his childhood as an immigrant in Cuba.<sup>34</sup> As a sample of the important change in Cuba-Spain relations, Magdalena Alvarez, in charge of public investment, was the first Spanish minister to visit Havana since 1996. She signed agreements on air traffic, predicting a closer cooperation between the two countries.<sup>35</sup>

Just by coincidence but with no less significance, Raúl Castro welcomed in Santiago de Cuba the descendents of the Spanish Admiral Cervera, who led the Spanish Navy in the 1898 defeat that ended the Spanish colonial presence in Cuba. The Cuban leader used the occasion to express unlimited admiration for the gallantry of the Spanish military in executing an impossible mission facing the US forces.<sup>36</sup> This mutual personal feeling (Fraga's friendly attitude for a son of a Galician, and Raúl's reverence for the Spanish colonial military) constantly surfaces in the Spanish-Cuban relationship and it is more easily detectable and used (sometimes manipulated) during periods of thawing in what at times seem to be a stormy relationship.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, the President of the autonomous region of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, a leading Partido Popular figure, very critical of the PSOE's government, expressed support for the dissident movement, in an escalation of criticism made by the PP on the new attitude of the Spanish government. This and other disagreements confirmed the end of what in the first part of the 90s was considered to be a consensus between the two parties regarding the policy to be observed on Cuba.

This Cuba-Spain exchange was enriched by an unprecedented and well publicized visit made to Miami by two high-level representatives of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Javier Sandomingo, director of the Ibero-America area, and Pablo Gómez de Olea, deputy director, interviewed a wide array of representatives of the Cuban exile community and Miami Spanish press for a week. They explained the new EU approach led by Spain and shared plans for meetings with the dissident movement in Cuba.<sup>38</sup>

But the Spanish front was not reduced to this high political level. Under a flair of normalcy, authorities reported that an increase in the number of Spanish citizens residing in Cuba and claiming pensions from the Spanish government,<sup>39</sup> while the Spanish consulate in Havana recorded between 800 and 1,000 visits to process documents. Of the 30,000 Spanish citizens living in Cuba, almost 3,000 receive pensions between €1,000 and €3,000, a fortune compared with US\$15 as basic salary in Cuba and a pension of US\$8.<sup>40</sup>

Almost coincidentally, another personality named Eduardo Aguirre arrived in Madrid to take the post of US ambassador. Aguirre, a Cuban émigré residing in Houston, an old friend of the Bush family, was offered this sensitive position in difficult times when the relationship between the Spanish and the US governments was very delicate as a result

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<sup>34</sup> Gabriela Calotti, 'Fraga no pidió a Raúl Castro la liberación de presos', *Diario las Américas*, 8/V/2005; AFP, 'Malestar en el PP por reunión de Fraga con Raúl Castro', *Diario las Américas*, 7/V/2005; EFE, 'Manuel Fraga considera un honor la visita de Raúl Castro a Galicia', *Diario las Américas*, 7/V/2005. Incidentally, Fraga made certain pertinent comments to *Deutsche-Welle* (9/VIII/2006) once the news of Castro's illness were announced, remembering that in 1992 he recommended the Spanish transition as a model for Cuba, not the Nicaraguan, as the Cuban leader says in the long and highly controversial interview with *Le Monde's* Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: biografía a dos voces* (Debate, Madrid, 2006), p. 467-468.

<sup>35</sup> AFP, 'Ministra vaticina mayor cooperación con Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 24/IV/2005.

<sup>36</sup> This sign of admiration matches the praise given by his brother Fidel in the course of the interview-book by Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: Biografía...*, *op. cit.*, p. 460, in which he reiterates his respect for General Franco.

<sup>37</sup> Mauricio Vicent, 'Los Cervera regresan a Cuba', *El País*, 27/III/2005; Orlando Guevara Núñez, 'Presidente Raúl homenaje a patriotas cubanos y almirante español', *Granma*, 26/III/2005.

<sup>38</sup> Gerardo Reyes, 'España no olvidó a los disidentes, dicen funcionarios', *El Nuevo Herald*, 20/III/2005;

Gustavo Pena, 'Prepara la UE reuniones con la disidencia en Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 20/III/2005.

<sup>39</sup> EFE, 'Españoles en Cuba reclaman pensiones', 10/XI/2005.

<sup>40</sup> EFE, 'Consulado de España en Cuba desbordado por enorme demanda', 26/IV/2005.

of the withdrawal of the Spanish military placed in Iraq by Spanish premier Aznar.<sup>41</sup> Although Aguirre has been very prudent not to deal with the Cuba issue, he has been relaying the displeasure of the White House for other moves made by the Zapatero government in Venezuela.

#### 4. 'To be Frank, My Dear, I Don't Give a Damn'

On the EU side, the lifting of the measures had as a most important result the visit to Havana paid by Louis Michel, Commissioner for Development. He met with several representatives of the dissident movement in Cuba, with Pérez Roque, minister of foreign affairs, and Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Assembly of the Popular Power, the Cuban parliament.<sup>42</sup> Alarcón has been one of the most critical voices regarding the relationship with the EU. On the eve of Pérez Roque's trip to Europe and right after Michel's visit to Havana, Alarcón demanded of the EU 'a little humility' in its relation with Cuba when pondering conditions for a better treatment. He labeled the suspended sanctions as 'childish' and considered 'unimportant' the promised help from the EU, while warning Europe of not treating Cuba as an 'unbecoming kid, suffering a punishment in a corner by a teacher without authority'.<sup>43</sup> Days after, Alarcón warned that 'Cuba would not give power to idiots', referring to the representatives of the dissident movement staging pacific demonstrations and meeting with EU officials.<sup>44</sup>

Oddly enough and not by coincidence, this visit was preceded by a special representation of the European Parliament. Miguel Angel Martínez, a Spanish radical member of the socialist group, led a group ('Of Friendship and Solidarity') of the EP members in support of Cuba. This group acted to counter the actions taken by the conservative majority led by Swedish EP member Cecilia Malstrom, who managed to present an amendment and get it approved (376 for, 281 against and 26 abstentions) thanks to the majority of the Popular Party-led group of an amendment in the sessions of the Parliament censuring the suspension of the EU measures on Cuba. The split of EU institutions on Cuba was then obvious. While the Commission was inclined to support the reform and the suspension of the measures, as the consensus majority of the EU Council voted, the EP Parliament majority expressed dissatisfaction. This is one of the reasons why when Pérez Roque visited the Parliament he only met with President Josep Borrell and with the pro-Cuba group. While in Havana, the Martínez-led group was received by Vice President Carlos Lage.<sup>45</sup>

Since the announcement of the change of EU approach, former Spanish premier José María Aznar continued with his criticism on the new Spain's foreign policy and then objected to the audience given by King Juan Carlos to Cuban Foreign Minister Pérez Roque, prompting prominent members of the Zapatero government to counter his arguments.<sup>46</sup> Using one of his periodic lectures at Georgetown University in Washington, Aznar branded as a 'total mistake' the lifting of the EU sanctions, because it 'only gives strength to the Cuban regime', with the result that 'the dissidents are used as

<sup>41</sup> EFE, 'Senado da visto bueno a Eduardo Aguirre', *Diario las Américas*, 17/VI/2005.

<sup>42</sup> Elson Concepción, 'Voluntad para ampliar las relaciones de amistad', *Granma*, 26/III/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'El comisario europeo de desarrollo visita Cuba', *El País*, 26/III/2005.

<sup>43</sup> Mar Marín, EFE, 'Alarcón advierte a la UE que no tiene autoridad para juzgar a Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 6/III/2005.

<sup>44</sup> AFP, 'Cuba no entregará el poder a "mentecatos"', *Diario las Américas*, 23/III/2005; EFE, 'Disidencia interna pide UE incluya liberaciones en agenda con Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 23/III/2005.

<sup>45</sup> EFE, 'Parlamento Europeo censura suspensión por la UE de sanciones a Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 1/IV/2005; Miguel Angel Pedroso, 'Satisfecha con su visita la delegación del grupo de Amistad y Solidaridad del Parlamento Europeo', 26/III/2005; 'Eurodiputados socialistas viajan a Cuba para apoyar a Fidel Castro', *ABC*, 19/III/2005.

<sup>46</sup> EFE, 'España defiende su política', *El Nuevo Herald*, 19/III/2005.

merchandise'.<sup>47</sup> Exhausting the patience of Spanish officials for the frequent criticisms made by Aznar on several aspects of Spain's foreign policy, and most especially the new approach to Cuba, Under Secretary of State Bernardino León called Aznar's attitude 'cynic' and reminded that the former premier himself tried in several occasions to come to terms with Castro offering a close relationship.<sup>48</sup>

The overall Cuban scenario and the moves by outside actors also show two events with important impact. One was the annual round of the meeting of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations in Geneva. The other was a novelty: the preparations of the unprecedented assembly organized by the dissident movement.

Much to the regret of the Cuban government that had invested considerable energy in special operations (among them the trip made by Pérez Roque to Europe) in the weeks before to obtain a favorable outcome, the UN Commission voted once again a Resolution (this time tabled by the United States) on the human rights situation in Cuba. 21 members (among all the EU members) voted against Cuba, 17 against the measure, while 15 abstained. Keen observers had predicted the outcome of the EU attitude based on the previous record. In 2004 all EU members sided with the Honduras led-measure; in 2003 Europe sided with the initiative taken by Costa Rica; and in 2002 the EU members added their vote to the Revolution presented by Uruguay.<sup>49</sup> When the outcome was known, Castro vented his anger at the UN Commission, using one novel expression in his long of epithets. This time was the equivalent of 'I don't give a damn'. He said: 'me importa un bledo la Comisión', branding this time the EU members as 'accomplices' of the United States.

A new trend in the activities of the opposition, a meeting of the 'Assembly to Protect Civil Society', composed of representatives of the dissidents, was planned and held on May 20, the day of Cuban independence, under the coordination of Martha Beatriz Roque. As expected, the Cuban government placed obstacles for the attendance of outside actors and representatives of European organizations, and confirmed attendees were not given visas or were stopped at the Havana airport. Among the resident diplomats who attended the proceedings was James Cason, chief of the US mission in Havana. However, the event was marred by internal disagreements among the different groups, among them the organization led by Olwaldo Payá, main author of the Proyecto Varela. The assembled members received warm congratulations messages from European politicians, among them the leadership of the Spanish Socialist Party.<sup>50</sup>

Among the benefits received by the dissident community was the liberation of poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, thanks to the active negotiations of the Spanish government. After deciding to reside in Spain, upon his arrival Rivero was received by Spanish premier

<sup>47</sup> EFE, 'Aznar: levantamiento de sanciones a Cuba es "completa equivocación"', *Diario las Américas*, 20/IV/2005.

<sup>48</sup> D. Gracia, 'No admito el cinismo, Aznar ya intentó acercarse a Cuba', *Expansión*, 14/XI/2005.

<sup>49</sup> A.Z., 'Cuba echa la red', *Cambio16*, 28/III/2005; AFP, 'Cuba espera que ningún "Caín" latinoamericano apoye a EEUU en Ginebra', *Diario las Américas*, 8/III/2005; AFP, 'UE apoya a EEUU que se condene a Cuba en Ginebra', *Diario las Américas*, 12/IV/2005; EFE, 'me importa un bledo Comisión de Derechos Humano', 9/IV/2005; EFE, 'Apoyo europeo a condena a Cuba en Ginebra', *Diario las Américas*, 13/IV/2005; EFE, 'Vuelven a condenar a Cuba en la ONU', *Diario las Américas*, 15/IV/2005; Ariel Remos, 'Sonada derrota de Castro en Ginebra', *Diario las Américas*, 16/IV/2005; Pablo Alfonso, 'El bledo y el nuevo juguete', *El Nuevo Herald*, 17/IV/2005; EFE, 'No necesitamos ayuda de la UE', *Diario las Américas*, 19/IV/2005; Pablo Alfonso, 'Ginebra, Cuba y la Unión Europea', *El Nuevo Herald*, 16/III/2005.

<sup>50</sup> *The Miami Herald*, editorial, 'A summit in Cuba to plan democracy', 20/V/2005; EFE, 'Disidente cubano agradece solidaridad de socialistas españoles', *Diario las Américas*, 20/V/2005; Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Se destapa una pugna en la oposición cubana', *El Nuevo Herald*, 7/IV/2005; Ariel Remos, 'Cuba en Asamblea', *Diario las Américas*, 21/V/2005; Mark Franck, 'Cuban dissidents hold meeting in Havana', *Financial Times*, 21/V/2005; Europa Press, 'Exiliados "sorprendidos" porque ningún político español ha confirmado su asistencia a la Asamblea del 20 de mayo', 18/V/2005.

Zapatero, under the auspices of PSOE international relations secretary Trinidad Jiménez (who later in the year would become the target of Castro's wrath).<sup>51</sup> Significantly, the PP leadership of Madrid gave him the award 'Tolerance' awarded the previous December.<sup>52</sup> Although an isolated incident, Rivero was detained for hours when he arrived at the Miami airport to participate as a lecturer at the Miami-Dade Community College, much to the embarrassment of the exile community leadership.<sup>53</sup>

Economic relations between European countries and Cuba were in the background of this evolution, and most especially the Spanish investments. At the end of 2004, the Cuban and Spanish governments agreed to close an agreement on the exchange of the debt for funds destined to education projects.<sup>54</sup> Oil conglomerate Repsol-YPF was exploring partnerships with Chinese and Norwegian companies.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, a reduction of business for small and median volume companies was predicted in the background of priority given to large multinational companies<sup>56</sup> and the aggressive strategy posed by China.<sup>57</sup> The Cuban government did not renew a dozen licences for small Spanish companies, while negotiations for unblocking the trade relations remained frozen.<sup>58</sup>

Oddly in preparation for the reconsideration of the EU approach, the Cuban government expelled three members of the parliaments of Spain, Germany and the Czech Republic, who had arrived in Havana to attend a gathering of the Assembly for the Civil Society, organized by dissident leader Martha Beatriz Roque. Four European journalists trying to cover the event were also detained, prompting the EU official protest, causing internal friction in Spain with the PP claiming lack of protection given by the Spanish diplomatic representation in Cuba.<sup>59</sup>

## 5. Don't Blame Me for Trying

In spite of all this conflictive and shaky scenario, as mentioned above, the EU Council decided on 13 June 2005, to continue with the suspension of the measures, giving the constructive dialogue policy a chance. This time, the EU even walked the extra mile in extending the term of the cyclic evaluation of the conditions of the 1996 Common Position, from a short six-month period to a whole year, offering Cuba the opportunity to show an improvement in its human rights record on June of 2006.

Previous to the announcement of the decisions, all sides with a stake in the issue lobbied the EU to either make a change in its policy or stay course. Over a hundred NGOs and cooperation agencies demanded the permanent lifting of the 2003 measures, the elimination of the Common Position, and the reestablishment of relations between the EU

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<sup>51</sup> P. Bachelet, 'Disidente cubano planea trasladarse a España', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/I/2005; *The Miami Herald*, 'Freed from Castro's jails dissident moves to Spain', 2/IV/2005; EFE, 'Rivero se fue de Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 2/IV/2005; Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Raúl Rivero llega a España', *El Nuevo Herald*, 2/IV/2005; AFP, 'Zapatero se reúne con Raúl Rivero', *Diario las Américas*, 3/IV/2005.

<sup>52</sup> AFP, 'Raúl Rivero recuerda a amigos presos en Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 19/V/2005.

<sup>53</sup> The Miami Herald, editorial, 'Rivero's US detention', *Diario las Américas*, 11/X/2005.

<sup>54</sup> José María Tríper, 'España y Cuba buscan acuerdo para desbloquear las relaciones comerciales', *Expansión*, 13/XII/2004.

<sup>55</sup> Roberto Casado, 'Repsol YPS en Cuba', *Expansión*, 3/VI/2005.

<sup>56</sup> José María Tríper, 'Cuba se abre a las multinacionales', *El País*, 28/VI/2005.

<sup>57</sup> EFE, 'Empresas españolas mantienen apuesta en Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 2/XI/2005.

<sup>58</sup> José María Tríper, 'El giro político de Castro "expulsa" de Cuba a las pymes españolas', *Expansión*, 13/VI/2005.

<sup>59</sup> *El País*, 'Cuba expulsa a políticos y periodistas europeos', 20/VI/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'Cuba expulsa a políticos europeos invitados a mayor foro disidente celebrado en La Habana', *El País*, 21/VI/2005; *El País*, 'La UE considera inaceptable la actitud de Castro', 21/VI/2005; *El País*, 'El gobierno presionó para evitar la expulsión', 21/VI/2005; Cecilia Fleita, 'Las expulsiones desatan las críticas de la política española hacia Cuba', *El País*, 22/VI/2005.

and Cuba based on mutual respect.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, a representation of the most important dissident organizations in Cuba demanded the EU's official recognition of the movement, stopping the issuing of trade loans to the Cuban regime, and the monitoring of the human rights situation, with the explicit recommendation of continuing with the sanctions imposed in 2003.<sup>61</sup> However, as many insiders<sup>62</sup> and independent observers predicted, the EU General Affairs Council decided to maintain the status quo taken in January of 2005.

Nonetheless, the text agreed cannot be taken as a triumph for the Cuban regime because it was laden with several samples of unusual harsh language. As mentioned earlier in this paper, while reaffirming the validity of the Common Position and reiterating its willingness to maintain a constructive dialogue, the EU insisted on 'its urgent request to Cuba to release unconditionally all political prisoners', and 'expressed regret at the lack of any further advance since the release in June and November of 2004 of a number of the political prisoners', and 'condemned the action taken by the Cuban authorities to curb the freedom of expression and assembly and freedom of the press'. It also 'condemned Cuba's unacceptable attitude towards foreign parliamentarians and journalists who attended the Assembly (of 20 May 2005)' and called on the Cuban authorities to refrain in the future from such actions which would jeopardize normal relations between Cuba and the European Union'. Finally, while noticing that 'there was no satisfactory progress on human rights', the EU decided to reconsider its Common Position in June 2006, while 'measures taken on June 5, 2003, remain suspended'.<sup>63</sup>

Repercussion in the media was wide and deep, creating a climate of further expectation, considering the hope expressed by different sectors for a change or reformatting of the existing policy.<sup>64</sup> The dissident community and representatives of the Cuban exiles expressed split opinions, showing satisfaction and displeasure (a majority).<sup>65</sup> As expected, the US government had issued earlier statements of disagreement with the continuation of the EU approach, backed by Spain.<sup>66</sup> Following the new trend on the European front, along with the business returning to normalcy, was the visit to Havana by Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago, who in 2003 had added his name to the long list of protestors for the summary executions and imprisonment of dissidents, expressing disgust, drawing a line in his long support for the Cuban regime ('*hasta aquí he llegado*', he titled an article of protest then).<sup>67</sup>

Inside the EU machinery and deep in the bowels of the Cuban governmental structure, there was a common sentiment that was to dominate the moves of each side in the coming months. According to seasoned observers and insiders in Brussels, each side had come to the conclusion: the arsenal of arguments available to influence each other was exhausted. The stalemate, in essence, neither benefited nor damaged their corresponding image, prestige, or appearance of power and resistance. The EU did show until then

<sup>60</sup> Communication to the Council of the EU, 'Revisión posición común Cuba', 8/VI/2005.

<sup>61</sup> Press release by the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba, Todos Unidos and Lawton Foundation, 10/VI/2005.

<sup>62</sup> EFE, 'Prevén que Europa no restablezca las sanciones', *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/VI/2005; EFE, 'Ferrero-Waldner espera que se mantenga actual política hacia Cuba', 13/VI/2005.

<sup>63</sup> Council of the European Union, External Relations Council Meeting, Luxemburg, 13/VI/2005.

<sup>64</sup> Santiago Delgado, EFE, 'Europa opta por el diálogo', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/VI/2005; Pablo Alfonso, 'Europa mantiene la mano tendida', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/VI/2005; Mariano Andrade, AFP, 'UE mantendrá suspensión de sanciones', *Diario las Américas*, 11/VI/2005; R.M. Rituerto, 'La UE constata que no hay avances en Cuba', *El País*, 14/VI/2005.

<sup>65</sup> EFE, 'Disidentes alaban y critican', *El Nuevo Herald*, 15/VI/2005; Carlos Alberto Montaner, 'Spain against the Cubans', *The New York Sun*, 16/VII/2005; Mariano Andrade, 'Disidencia pide "nueva política" de UE contra regimen castrista', 15/VI/2005.

<sup>66</sup> José Manuel Calvo, 'EEUU discrepa de la política exterior española sobre Cuba y Venezuela', *El País*, 11/VI/2005.

<sup>67</sup> EFE, 'Saramago regresa a Cuba', *El Nuevo Herald*, 16/VI/2005; EFE, 'Saramago reafirma su lealtad a Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 18/VI/2005.

enough evidence that it tried at all cost to maintain the communications lines open. The Cuban regime could proudly say that it had resisted all kinds of pressure and conditions. Both came to the final conclusion they can neither influence the other side the way they had expected, nor can the other side do them any harm that they could prevent. At the end, they stopped communicating, at least on the subject that was central, and still is, so far. It is not that both were happy, but that this is the most they could attain. The EU gave the Cubans one year of trust, which was in spirit rejected by Havana.

No one was then surprised to see that, from mid 2005 to mid 2006, everything seemed to be a sort of business as usual, more of the same. It is also not surprising, then, that while some non EU-Cuba scenarios shown repetitious profiles of past experiences, and some others were fast approaching to fill the vacuum. It was obvious that the world horizons for Cuba were not reduced to the alternatives between Washington and Brussels. While traditional alliances were still courted by Castro, the eyes of Havana turned towards the Americas not fully dominated by the United States. New circumstances provided Castro with a much wider alternative of insertion than the limited scenario offered by the EU in the Caribbean branch of the ACP structure. While the United States and Europe insisted in the old corresponding script of harassment and constructive engagement, the new Bolivarian 'revolution' staged by Chávez in Venezuela gave the Cuban regime a much-needed respite.<sup>68</sup>

## 6. Other Actors and Settings

The two-year period between the beginnings of the announcement of the first attempts to reformat the EU position to Cuba has revealed the active performance of several Czech officials and former dignitaries of high profile. It can be safely said that the EU attitude is roughly divided between a group of nations actively advocating for the constructive engagement policy, another that expresses a prudent and more conditioned approach, and the Czech Republic. It is not an insignificant factor to note that it was precisely the former Czechoslovak Republic (then including the current Slovakia) that represented the Cuban interests in Washington. It seems that any scenario and setting is valid for what appears to be a constant, untiring policy.

The record includes a full conference held in Prague, under the aegis of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (CIDC), presided by former president Vaclav Havel, attended by an impressive array of former presidents of mostly Christian Democratic affiliation, and former prime ministers of European countries, such as Spain's José María Aznar (one of the main backers), Luis Alberto Lacalle of Uruguay, Luis Alberto Monge of Costa Rica, Patricio Aylwin of Chile, Kim Campbell of Canada, and former Secretaries of State of the United States Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Madeleine Albright.<sup>69</sup> While most of the dissident organizations expressed support for the Prague meeting, some issued statements of scepticism.

Subsequent incidents between the two countries have included a constant campaign by the Czech embassy in Washington, with high profile Ambassador Paulus frequently attending as sole diplomat White House or State Department functions announcing new measures against Cuba, seminar, lectures, and press briefings held in Miami in contrast with the customary usual diplomatic pattern that normally avoids dealing with the business

<sup>68</sup> For a commentary on the Castro-Chávez relationship, see: Daniel P. Erikson, 'Hugo Chavez Cuba's Kingmaker?', *Los Angeles Times*, 13/VIII/2006.

<sup>69</sup> Ariel Remos, 'Cumbre mundial en Praga apoyará oposición en Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 16/IX/2004; Pablo Alfonso, 'Plan de apoyo a la libertad de Cuba', *El Nuevo Herald*, 19/IX/2004; Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Payá a favor de la cumbre de Praga', *El Nuevo Herald*, 21/IX/2004; Carlos Alberto Montaner, 'Praga y el problema cubano', *El Nuevo Herald*, 19/IX/2004.

of third countries.<sup>70</sup> The notorious string of incidents on both sides of the Atlantic included alleged threats made against the Foreign Minister for his criticism against Castro,<sup>71</sup> the expulsion of the first secretary of the Czech embassy in Havana for alleged spy activities,<sup>72</sup> the cancellation by the Cuban government of a reception in a Havana hotel organized by the Czech embassy in its national day in retaliation for issuing invitations to dissidents.<sup>73</sup> This scenario was set in the background of the frequent columns and collective declarations signed by Vaclav Havel, published world wide in dozens of newspapers.<sup>74</sup> As a rule, Prague has issued frequent public declarations, before and after the meetings of the EU Council, pressuring the European members for a revision of the consensus in the policy towards Cuba, filtering details of the negotiations to the press, and making the work of the EU body very difficult, much to the displeasure of the inside staff and representatives of the governments.<sup>75</sup>

The life of the dissident movement did not seem to improve in the second semester of 2005 under the British presidency of the EU. In spite of the fact that France led a motion in the direction of the Cuban government by inviting officials to the high profile reception of 14 July,<sup>76</sup> the Castro government unleashed a new wave of harassment (executed by 'turbas') against the opposition around the anniversary of the revolution on 26 July.<sup>77</sup> The British EU presidency issued a declaration of concern, demanding the release of the new imprisoned dissidents.<sup>78</sup> Although about 30 dissidents were detained, 18 were released shortly.<sup>79</sup> The president of the Popular Party in the European Parliament judged the new EU policy as an error.<sup>80</sup> Dissident leader Oswaldo Payá denounced that the government had started 'a campaign of repression' against him and his movement that included interrogation visits to signatories of his Proyecto Varela.<sup>81</sup> Subsequently, government-sponsored groups placed obstacles for a meeting of representatives of the dissidents in the EU delegation in Havana, an incident that was interpreted by Brussels as a direct disdainful message to the efforts of keeping the communications lines open with both the government and the dissident sectors.<sup>82</sup>

Within this timeframe, exile scholar Rafael Rojas wondered why the Cuban regime still enjoyed so much support in Latin America. His conclusion was that the Cuban myth persisted because it feeds with nostalgia on the resistance against the United States in an increasingly unipolar world. Castro insisted on presenting himself 'as a Latin American David, confronting an Anglo-Saxon egotistical Goliath, in other words as moral nemesis of the United States. He knows that the small authority left for Havana is only a gift from his most intransigent enemies'.<sup>83</sup> It was not a simple coincidence that on 28 July, the State Department made the announcement of the appointment of Caleb McCarry as 'Coordinator of the Cuban Transition', a position to be inserted in the structure created by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba', set in 2004 with the purpose of

<sup>70</sup> Ariel Remos, 'Hay que buscar posición común contra Castro', *Diario las Américas*, 19/X/2005.

<sup>71</sup> Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Amenazan al canciller checo por crítica a Cuba', *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/XI/2005.

<sup>72</sup> AFP, 'Diplomático checo acusado de espiar para EEUU abandona Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 18/IV/2006; EFE, 'Tensión entre Praga y La Habana', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/IV/2006.

<sup>73</sup> *El Nuevo Herald*, 'Checos firmes contra Castro', 5/XI/2005.

<sup>74</sup> 'El discreto terror de Fidel Castro', *El País*, 1/VI/2006.

<sup>75</sup> EFE, 'Checos piden a Europa más presión sobre Castro', *El Nuevo Herald*, 7/VI/2006.

<sup>76</sup> Elitsa Vucheva, 'France makes unilateral move on Cuba', *EU Observer*, 18/VII/2005.

<sup>77</sup> Isabel Sánchez, 'Descontento y tensión rodean fiesta castrista', *El Nuevo Herald*, 26/VII/2005.

<sup>78</sup> EFE, 'La presidencia de la UE pide la libertad de los presos políticos', *El Nuevo Herald*, 26/VII/2005.

<sup>79</sup> Mauricio Vicent, 'Cuba detiene a una veintena de opositores', *El País*, 23/VII/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'La oposición cubana dice que seguirá retando a Castro', *El País*, 25/VII/2005.

<sup>80</sup> EFE, 'El PP critica la postura de España', *El Nuevo Herald*, 26/VII/2005.

<sup>81</sup> AFP, 'Payá denuncia fuerte ola represiva', *El País*, 6/VIII/2005.

<sup>82</sup> Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Turbas castristas asedian a opositores', *El País*, 6/VIII/2005; Anita Snow, 'Dissident meeting usurped', *The Miami Herald*, 6/VIII/2005; Andrea Rodríguez, 'Simpatizantes del gobierno se apropian de cita opositora', *El Nuevo Herald*, 5/VIII/2005.

<sup>83</sup> Rafael Rojas, 'La persistencia del mito cubano', *El País*, 25/VII/2005.

coordinating the efforts of several US agencies in providing support to a new government in Cuba at the moment of the political transition.<sup>84</sup> Secretary Rice and McCarry publicly and singly recognized the presence of Czech Ambassador Paulus as sole diplomat in attendance.<sup>85</sup>

This assistance is supposed to be conditioned to the implementation of a set of measures and criteria according to the lines of liberal democracy and a market economy. The essence and the letter of the conditions are not different than the ones included in Title II of the Helms-Burton act. Significantly, McCarry was at the time of the congressional approval of the law an assistant of Roger Noriega, chief of the office of Senator Helms. It is a significant detail that Title II (never suspended, even temporarily as Title III is every semester by authority of the President) contemplated the implementation of a coordinator figure very similar to the one bestowed on McCarry. Among the new measures taken by the US government in this setting was the drastic restriction on travel from the United States to Cuba, adding to the perennial resistance of the Cuban government for its citizens to freely emigrate. Human rights organizations and international observers heavily criticized this US move.<sup>86</sup> As this essay will later show, the Commission issued an update report in mid 2006.<sup>87</sup>

Although the relationship has been long, during this same term frequent news about a reinforced partnership between Cuba and Venezuela began to worry the US government. This trend coincided with an increase in complications in the Middle East once the celebrations of Bush's reelection were over. As developments later would show with the membership of Venezuela in Mercosur after leaving the Andean Community, Cuba elected a much wider theatre of operations than the limited scenario of the Caribbean. Castro and Chávez embarked in an ambitious operation of swapping their much precious human and material resources. While the Cuban leader provided free social, educational, and medical assistance, Venezuela backed the Cuban economy with oil.<sup>88</sup>

It is not surprising then, as a confirmation of the new low priority given by Castro to the European scene, that he finally elected not to attend the Ibero-American summit held in the Spanish city of Salamanca, in spite of the lobbying made by the Spanish government to obtain a record participation. Although the exile community made preparations for protests, Castro decided to follow the pattern of remaining absent since the summit held in Panamá in 2000. He gave as an excuse that he had to concentrate in the efforts of delivering Cuban help to Central America and Pakistan in times of natural disasters.<sup>89</sup> Although threats of an attempt against his life were mentioned as a justification and the fact that a potential court order could place him arrested as Pinochet in London, the more plausible explanation was that the occasion did not merit his efforts. He preferred instead to concentrate his energies in selected travels where he would obtain the reward of unquestioned stardom, not subject to hidden conditions in order not to embarrass his hosts, among them King Juan Carlos and the new prime minister of Spain.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless

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<sup>84</sup> Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, Report to the President, May 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Announcement of Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry, 28/VII/2005.

<sup>86</sup> Pablo Alfonso, 'Critican a Cuba y EEUU por límites a los viajes', *El Nuevo Herald*, 20/X/2005; 'Human Rights Watch pide a Cuba y EEUU abolir restricciones de viajes', *Diario las Américas*, 20/X/2005; Janette Habel, 'Cuba entre presiones externas y bloqueos internos', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 2004.

<sup>87</sup> For a critical assessment, see Dan Erikson, 'The Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba: Oops, They Did it Again', *FOCAL Point*, July/August 2006, vol. 6, p. 3-4.

<sup>88</sup> AP, 'Castro y Chávez cambian médicos cubanos por petróleo venezolano', 1/VIII/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'El consultorio de dos comandantes', *El País*, 22/VIII/2005; Mauricio Vicent, 'Castro y Chávez refuerzan su plan de integración al de EEUU', *El País*, 21/VIII/2005.

<sup>89</sup> Ariel Remos, 'Querrela contra Castro', *Diario las Américas*, 15/X/2005.

<sup>90</sup> Ciaran Giles, 'Castro highlights summit's guest list', *The Miami Herald*, 10/X/2005; *El Nuevo Herald*, 'Prevén presencia de Castro', 10/X/2005; AFP, 'Castro no toma el avión', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/X/2005; Ariel Remos, 'Inician exiliados cubanos campaña', *Diario las Américas*, 13/X/2005.

the gathering could be considered a positive milestone for the Cuban government not only by the fact that no critical remarks were made on the human rights situation and no demands or recommendations were given to Foreign Minister Pérez Roque, substituting for Castro, but by virtue of a significant linguistic detail used in the official documentary declarations. For the first time in the history of the Ibero-American submits, the word '*bloqueo*' ('blockade') was used in substitution of the milder term '*embargo*' as it is customarily used also in governmental Spanish. '*Bloqueo*' is normally only employed by parties, groups and commentators much inclined to give unconditional support to the Cuban regime. Caught in the media dispute and the concerns expressed by the US administration, the Spanish government and the Ibero-American submit staff stated that the term is regularly used in Spanish in the documents issued by the United Nations.<sup>91</sup>

The 'canapé war' (as the confrontation over the polemic invitation of dissidents to national celebrations in European embassies in Havana is called) was renewed during the month of October as the new EU approach was interpreted in different ways by each one of the governments, now more free to choose an alternative way for maintaining links with the opposition. This policy was under the scrutiny of numerous observers not only in different European countries but also in the Americas.<sup>92</sup> On the one hand, the German embassy elected to have not one reception, but two, one in the morning for the diplomatic corps and a second in the afternoon to receive members of the 'civil society'. But the Cuban government did not like this compromise and boycotted attending the diplomatic gathering. As referred above, at the end of the month, the Cuban government suspended the celebration of the Czech national day in a Spanish Sol Meliá hotel in Havana, an incident that prompted the protest of the dissident movement against the hotel chain, accusing the Spanish business of 'confabulation' with the Cuban government.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, the Spanish embassy implemented the new policy. It consisted not inviting the dissidents, but also organizing periodic meetings with them, an approach that apparently received the nodding of the Cuban authorities. Nonetheless, Castro increased his periodic declarations of protest against not only the United States, but also against any efforts of the European countries and the EU to impose conditions on assistance. Simultaneously, the Czech and Slovak governments reiterated their intentions of coordinating efforts in convincing the rest of the EU to reinstate the measures taken in 2003.<sup>94</sup>

However, from mild diplomatic flaps, the confrontation between Cuba's apparent most important link in Europe and the Castro government picked up as the year was closing. The new occasion was the expulsion of two members of the Spanish Association for a Cuba in Transition (AECT), who had been in the country compiling information for a report.<sup>95</sup> His material, including video recording of declarations of the organization Ladies in White (families of political prisoners) demanding the support of the EU Parliament that had awarded them a prize for their activity.<sup>96</sup> The Spanish government protested the

<sup>91</sup> *El Nuevo Herald*, 'Postura antiembargo en la Cumbre', 16/X/2005; *El Mundo*, 'La Cumbre Iberoamericana pedirá a EEUU el fin del embargo a Cuba', 14/X/2005; *El Mundo*, 'EEUU ve "inquietante" la condena del embargo a Cuba', 15/X/2005; *PL*, 'Exitos de Cuba en Cumbre Iberoamericana', 14/X/2005; Frances Robles, 'Cuba hails condemnation by summit of "blockade"', *The Miami Herald*, 19/X/2005.

<sup>92</sup> Danilo Arbilla, '¿Cuán peligrosa es la nueva política europea hacia Cuba?', *El Nuevo Herald*, 13/II/2005.

<sup>93</sup> AFP, 'Disidentes acusan a la cadena Sol Meliá', *El Nuevo Herald*, 1/XI/2005.

<sup>94</sup> Mauricio Vicent, 'Vuelve 'la guerra del canapé' en Cuba', *El País*, 5/X/2005; Frances Robles, 'Invitations create diplomatic flap', *The Miami Herald*, 6/X/2005; Isabel Sánchez, 'Crece tensión entre Cuba y la Unión Europea', *Diario las Américas*, 6/X/2005; AFP, 'Al rojo la tensión con Europa', *El Nuevo Herald*, 5/X/2005; EFE, 'Cuba valora gesto de España de no invitar a disidentes', 14/X/2005; Peru Egurbide, 'La Embajada en Cuba invitará por separado a autoridades y disidentes', *El País*, 6/X/2005; Pablo Alfonso, 'Castro arremete contra la Unión Europea', *El Nuevo Herald*, 30/X/2005.

<sup>95</sup> For information on this organization and its reports, see: <http://www.cubaentransicion.com/>

<sup>96</sup> EFE, 'Expulsan a activistas españoles que elaboraban informe de derechos humanos', *Diario las Américas*,

expulsion measure, almost just after Fidel Castro used one of his speeches to harshly criticized the comments made by the international relations director of the PSOE, Trinidad Jiménez, who had earlier demanded the termination of the harassment of the Cuban opposition.<sup>97</sup> Jiménez, who earlier in the year was instrumental in the process for the release and ultimate residence of dissident poet Raúl Rivero in Spain, was this time branded by Castro as ‘a functionary of a party that calls itself Socialist or Social Democratic’, a rather unusual and disdainful way to refer to the party led in the past by Felipe González and now by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and considered by the Spanish opposition of the PP as friendly to the Cuban regime. It must also be noted that the Ladies in White organization delivered a letter to the British embassy (as EU presidency) asking for the release of political prisoners, while holding press conferences in front of the Spanish embassy.<sup>98</sup>

In this context, it needs to be noted that some protagonists of the dissident movement are more favored than others. For example, former Spanish premier José María Aznar and the Popular Party have shown an inclination for Oswaldo Payá, whose group is backed by Christian Democratic interests.<sup>99</sup> Other political formations in Spain and Europe support, morally or with indirect funding, Social Democratic dissidents, such as the group led by Manuel Cuesta Morúa, and individuals that in an open society could then develop middle of the way Liberal parties. That wide spread of political views generates contrasts between the consensus that the EU Council has to craft when issuing a declaration and the mathematical vote counting that the EU Parliament uses in commissions and in plenary sessions, where the majority of Christian Democratic and conservative members manage to incline the decisions towards a more critical view. Faithful to his backers when he was running for office, Aznar has maintained his support for the CANF. When the crisis of Castro’s illness exploded, Aznar pledged his support and the resources of his FAES foundation for the efforts of the organization.<sup>100</sup>

In a series of roundtables held in Brussels on 8 November 2005, in what appeared to be a compact recording of the different attitudes of the several sectors from different countries that had a saying on the evolution of the Cuban regime and the measures applied to influence, persuade, or coerce it, several representatives of the EU institutions and European governments issued unusual statements rarely ventured in public. Among US government and scholars, and a handful of European observers and researches, Karl Buck, a pivotal staff member of the EU Council and head of its Latin American unit, responded to the usual criticism that the European front was divided regarding the policy to be applied to Cuba by pointing out that the US sector was equally divided, with interest in food exporting states opposed to the US embargo strategy. Javier Sandomingo (who years ago was the acting Spain’s ambassador for three years when Castro rescinded the placet to the newly-named envoy Josep Coderch), now director of the Latin American division in the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, deflected the accusation that Spain only acted by economic interests in espousing the new policy of ‘constructive engagement’. He pointed out that Spain was surpassed by Canada in investments, and by the United Kingdom and Italy in tourism, while in trade Spain is behind Venezuela... and even the United States.<sup>101</sup> He admitted that it is very difficult for the EU to maintain a real Common Position, because that does not exclude that each of the Member States have its own

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11/XII/2005; EFE, ‘Malestar por expulsión de dos españoles’, *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/XI/2005.

<sup>97</sup> EFE, ‘Madrid protesta por expulsión de dos españoles de Cuba’, *Diario las Américas*, 12/XII/2005; EFE, ‘Castro arremete de nuevo contra Europa y EEUU’, *Diario las Américas*, 8/XII/2005.

<sup>98</sup> EFE, ‘Esposa de disidente preso apela a Europa’, *El Nuevo Herald*, 20/XII/2005.

<sup>99</sup> See also, for example, the support given by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Czech President Vaclav Havel. ‘The Cuba’s people must be heard’, *The Miami Herald*, 13/VIII/2006.

<sup>100</sup> *El País*, ‘Aznar ofrece su apoyo a la oposición en el exilio’, 6/VIII/2006.

<sup>101</sup> In reality, in global figures covering the period 2005-06, trade financing records show Venezuela well ahead with US\$2.05 billion, followed by China with US\$1.1 billion, and France and the Netherlands also surpassing Spain.

policy, including countries such as Spain with a long history of intimate relations with Cuba and others that barely can place this country on the map. Rejecting the notion that Spain gave the Cuban regime legitimacy, while admitting that the open communication policy has obtained the expected results, the economic reforms promoted by Spain in the early 90s resulted in an improvement of the livelihood of ample sectors of the Cuban population, an aspect that only time will show if in the future would be accepted as positive for the transition. Tomás Duplá, director of the Latin American area in the Commission, in a rare public statement for a non-political staff member, admitted that the EU and the United States share common features regarding their corresponding policies towards, among them the promotion of economic recovery and the support of civil society and the opposition, but the tactics employed do not coincide. While European investments aim to construct a more open system, the US extraterritorial laws tend to close it. While the dialogue with the Cuban government is part of the equation, it is not an end in itself. For different reasons, Cuba has become a domestic issue in both continents and this factor has contributed to the difficulties to find a common ground.<sup>102</sup>

## 7. A New Stormy Season

The year 2006 responded to the expectations with the battle lines well drawn between the Cuban government and the outside actors, each one well assured and resigned that the most important factor in a considerable change of the profile and behavior of the Cuban regime would only come within the framework of the political transition. While for some this goal was aimed to be within the reaching range, considering the age of Castro (to be 80 in August), for others the calendar was not to be central issue, but the appropriate record of measures to be taken. Nonetheless, all actors had their agendas well set in anticipation and hidden cards were difficult to be thrown on the table. That is the main explanation for what appeared to be a de-escalation of the diplomacy behavior that had central stage in a portion of the previous years. Assured that its priorities were going to be placed in other regions where play it cards, the Cuban government did not lose any opportunity to actively question any move of the EU, and most specially Spain, that was not in line with the potential benefit for the Castro regime.

For example, when the President of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, visited Miami on a trade promotion mission, and vowed 'support for a future democratic Cuba,' *Granma* accused her of financing the Cuban American National Foundation and its branch in Madrid, where Cuban Ambassador Velazco denounced her for meeting with 'torturers of Batista'. When US Senator Mel Martínez visited Madrid and was received by Spain's heir Prince Felipe, Velazco called Martínez 'a representative of the Miami terrorists'. Consequently, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a protest.<sup>103</sup> Concurrently, a representation of the Cuban National Foundation was invited to participate in a seminar organized by the Jaime Vera Foundation of the PSOE in Madrid.<sup>104</sup>

Press reports revealed what it was already a well known trend by the keen observers of the Spanish-Cuban contradictory scene: many children and close family (called '*quedaditos*') of current and former high level Cuban officials have been residing in Spain

<sup>102</sup> FRIDE, '¿Objetivos comunes, estrategias diferentes? Opciones para una agenda transatlántica sobre Cuba', Informe de Conferencia, 8/XI/2005.

<sup>103</sup> EFE, 'Cuba critica financiación de la Comunidad de Madrid', *Diario las Américas*, 15/VI/2005; Jaime Treceño, 'Aguirre: 'Podrán contar conmigo para una Cuba libre y democrática'', *La Razón*, 5/IV/2005; EFE, 'Reprochan a embajador cubano críticas a la Presidenta de Madrid', *Diario las Américas*, 7/IV/2005; EFE, 'Mel Martínez no se siente ofendido por acusaciones de Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 23/II/2005; EFE, 'El canciller español protesta por crítica del embajador cubano', *El Nuevo Herald*, 7/IV/2005.

<sup>104</sup> Soren Triff, 'Socialistas españoles y exiliados cubanos juntos?', *El Nuevo Herald*, 29/VI/2005.

with a status that ranges from exile to temporary residence and full time jobs.<sup>105</sup> The roll call is really impressive and includes the children of two commanders of the Cuban Revolution (Ramiro Valdés and Juan Almeyda), an uncle of US congressmen Lincoln and Mario Díaz-Balart, and the son of Havana's historian Eusebio Leal, leader of the tourism and preservation projects. It is estimated that there are more than 200,000 Cubans living in Spain, of which 60,000 have Spanish citizenship, making them the largest Cuban population outside of Cuba with the exception of the United States, where close to one million Cubans live.

In expectation of the forthcoming IV Summit of the EU-Latin America-Caribbean to be held in Vienna and the revision of the Common Position due in June, the Spanish government received expected pressures from the domestic opposition.<sup>106</sup> However, in spite of the reported difficulties suffered by small Spanish enterprises in Cuba, a group of companies were preparing contracts worth €180 million.<sup>107</sup>

The patience of the EU Parliament with Cuba ended and the customary division between the Socialist group and the Conservative-Christian Democratic-led majority did not function in view of the slow progress made by the Castro government in matters of human rights. By an unprecedented overwhelming majority of 560 votes for, and only 33 against and 19 abstentions, on 2 February 2006, the EU body 'condemned the strengthening of repression, the increase of the number of political prisoners (from 294 in 2004 to 333) and the prohibition for the Ladies in White to come to Strasburg to receive the Sajarov Prize'. The EU Parliament wondered about the success of the lifting of the measures in 2005.<sup>108</sup>

In the apparently dormant front of the Torricelli and the Helm-Burton legislation, a grave incident erupted in Mexico when the US government ordered the Sheraton Hotel in Mexico City to evict 16 Cuban representatives who were in town to meet with US oilmen, in a rare application of the embargo legislation that prohibits trade and deals with Cuba. The Mexican government then retaliated by ordering the closure of the hotel.<sup>109</sup> This world famous US legislation has only its Title III suspended every six months regarding the potential execution of a clause by which US citizens could sue foreign companies making deals with former summarily expropriated US properties. Subsequently, the US and the EU authorities designed in 1998 an agreement of 'understanding' freezing the possibility of actions against European companies. However, Latin American and Canadian businesses are not free of this threat, because it only applies to EU-US controversies.

On the strictly US-Cuba front, the escalation of the mostly verbal and juridical mutual harassment seemed to show some interesting angles, although they have been within the historical parameters. In the fringes of the US territory, the US and Cuba came to a draw with a significant different outcome in the academic and sports terrains. While the US government had to bow to international pressure and allow the Cuban baseball team to participate in the World Cup in Puerto Rico and California, the State Department denied once more the necessary visas for over 70 Cuban academics to attend the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) convention held in San Juan, partially under the justification that the paper presenters are in fact government employees. Observers pointed out that the banning of the baseball team could render the expulsion of the United

<sup>105</sup> G. Hedgecoe, 'Los hijos de castristas se quedan en España', *El Nuevo Herald*, 17/VI/2005.

<sup>106</sup> *El Nuevo Herald*, 'Crítica política española', 23/IV/2005.

<sup>107</sup> EFE, 'Empresas españolas negocian contratos con Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 7/VI/2006.

<sup>108</sup> R.M. de Rituerto, 'El Parlamento Europeo cuestiona la política de flexibilidad hacia Castro', *El País*, 2/II/2006.

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth Emmond, 'Sheraton incident highlights absurdity of Helms-Burton Act', *El Universal/The Meherrals*, Mexico, 19/II/2006; Pablo Bachelet, 'US hotel chain discuss handling Cuba sanctions', *The Miami Herald*, 18/II/2006; AFP, 'Clausuran el Sheraton que expulsó a cubanos', *El Nuevo Herald*, 1/III/2006; Joaquim Ibarz, 'Tormenta en el Sheraton', *La Vanguardia*, 11/II/2006; APF, 'Rechazan que empresas de EEUU puedan aplicar la ley Helms-Burton', *Diario las Américas*, 8/II/2006.

States from world sport organizations, while the academic sector does not enjoy a similar political and financial clout.<sup>110</sup> As a consolation for defenders of academic freedom, LASA voted in an unprecedented move (with considerable economic cost) to move the September 2007 from Boston to Montreal, Canada, where the Cubans could attend without the requirements of US visas.

## 8. The Evolution and Transfiguration of the Embargo Legislation

All the global strategy of the US government towards Cuba received a new and invigorated shape with the presentation of the new Report drafted by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. The result of the work of more than one hundred officials in 17 different agencies, the new document of only 90 pages refines the arguments of the previous voluminous 2004 report of over 400 pages, claimed a budget of US\$80 million destined to 'support civil society, 'academic exchanges, 'projects to break the Castro government information blockade', broadcasting operations (Radio and TV Martí), and aid to the opposition.<sup>111</sup> While the Coordinator of the Commission Caleb McCarray praised the report and representatives of the Cuban exile community lauded its release,<sup>112</sup> the Cuban government unleashed its wrath with a new round of harsh epithets against the US policy,<sup>113</sup> and the opposition showed new signs of split regarding the measures and scope of the new policy, with the hardest criticism coming from prominent members of the dissident movement pointing out that the content of the report would only benefit Fidel Castro.<sup>114</sup>

The document enjoyed a sudden thrust in the media limelight when the alarming news of the illness and temporary withdrawal of Fidel Castro were announced. The initial scant statements coming from Washington focused on the report. Under the co-authorship of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her colleague in Commerce, Cuban-American Carlos Gutiérrez, is simply a series of recommendations for President Bush in support of Cuba's transition to democracy. It looks like an honest offer for a future government, but while the present dictatorship is in place, the invitation is void.

The sudden stardom of the document in the context of Castro's temporary trouble confirmed a subtle tactic of the White House and the Department of State to upgrade the status of this declaration of intentions to the level of law. In fact, the report reiterates the proposal of the previous, more voluminous, document of 2004, then under the sole authorship of Colin Powell. Although the Commission was established a year earlier under the co-chair of a Cuban-American member of the Bush cabinet, Mel Martínez, he ceased to serve when he became US Senator. However, the new document still had the background inspiration of the main advocate of the most important legislation on the US

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<sup>110</sup> William M. Leogrande, 'Cuban ballplayers wield a bigger policy bat', *The Miami Herald*, 7/III/2006; Mauricio Vicent, 'El béisbol enfrenta a Cuba y EEUU', *El País*, 11/III/2006.

<sup>111</sup> See web: [www.caafc.gov](http://www.caafc.gov). Pablo Bachelet, 'Report urges funding Castro foes', *The Miami Herald*, 30/VII; José Manuel Calvo, 'Dólares para apoyar la vía democrática', *El País*, 16/VII/2006; José Manuel Calvo, 'EEUU diseña un plan para la transición en Cuba', *El País*, 11/VII/2006; Guy Dinmore, 'US sees regime change in Cuba', *The Financial Times*, 7/VII/2006; Pablo Bachelet and Frances Robles, 'Plan for change in Cuba gets OK', *The Miami Herald*, 11/VII/2006.

<sup>112</sup> Emilio J. López, 'EEUU apoya a elecciones libres en Cuba', *Diario las Américas*, 14/VII/2006; Jorge Sanguinety, 'Informe sobre el infierno', *Diario las Américas*, 15/VII/2006.

<sup>113</sup> César Muñoz Acebes, 'EEUU ofrece incentivos económicos para una Cuba sin Fidel', *Diario las Américas*, 12/VII/2006; José Luis Paniagua, 'Recomendaciones en EEUU Cuba abren nuevo capítulo de tensión', *Diario las Américas*, 2/VII/2006; Frances Robles, 'Bush plan decried as land grab', *The Miami Herald*, 13/VII/2006; Mauricio Vicent, 'La Habana compara el plan Bush para Cuba con el "Mein Kampf" de Hitler', *El País*, 14/VII/2006; Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, 'El Mein Kampf de Bush y la Bella Durmiente', *Granma*, 18/VII/2006.

<sup>114</sup> Carlos Batista, 'Critican plan de "Asistencia para una Cuba Libre"', *Diario las Américas*, 11/VII/2006; Miriam Leiva, 'We Cubans must decide', *The Miami Herald*, 15/VII/2006, and 'El mejor regalo para Castro', *El Nuevo Herald*, 15/VII/2006.

embargo, Cuban-American Senator from New Jersey, Bob Menéndez.<sup>115</sup> Filled by technical details, but laden with political content, the report was to be interpreted as one of the Washington mistakes that led to the approval of the Helms-Burton act, universally received with irritation and lament. The result was that Helms-Burton has been in mothballs since then.

An exploration of the web of the Commission ([www.cafc.gov](http://www.cafc.gov)) in the digital space of the State Department strangely reveals that Helms-Burton is not mentioned at all as part of the legislation on the US embargo ([www.cafc.gov/leg/](http://www.cafc.gov/leg/)). In contrast, it explicitly includes the Cuban Adjustment Act and the Cuban democracy Act of 1992 (better known as the 'Torricelli' law). This absence is significant, since H-B is the codification of the historical embargo, when it transformed what was subject to the free will of the President since the 60s to federal law in 1996.

This neutralization would seem as a gesture to the EU, reaffirming the understanding of 1998 to freeze the threat against investments in Cuba. But the true reason may be to hide the darker aspects of its Title II. In contrast with III, addressed to foreign investors daring to 'traffic' with expropriated properties, II was designed for a future Cuban government to be dutifully certified in good transition to democracy. It demands the return of all confiscated properties to their original owners, in a plan that is economically and socially unfeasible for any government. But, as a federal law, it is still in place and guarantees the continuation of the embargo. Ironically, designed as a shackle for President Clinton, of dubious loyalty to Cuban exile causes, it now hovers over Bush's head in uncertain times. In order to supersede it with different measures and decisions on the embargo, it has to be officially and procedurally repealed.

A careful reading of Title II is a revealing lesson, in contrast with the language used in the new report. In its origin, Title II was a separate bill sponsored by then New Jersey congressman Bob Menéndez. Its original name significantly was 'Support for a Free and Democratic Cuba'. Failing to pass the corresponding committee of the House, its was transfigured as the second part of the final Helms-Burton approved in 1996 in the aftermath of the shot down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes. A listing of conditions on a democratic Cuba it was added to a threat (Title III and IV) against foreign investors. Economic compensation and financial restitution were then backed by altruistic democracy-seeking aims.

The parallel reading of Title II and the recommendations of the report show that the direct and harsh language of H-B has been softened considerably. Title II prescribes that, in order to accept a Cuban government in good standing to enjoy the lifting of the embargo, it demands that the new government is 'taking appropriate steps to return to United States citizens property taken by the Cuban Government from such citizens and entities on or after 1 January 1959, or to provide equitable compensation to such citizens and entities for such property'.

In the preface of the first report, Colin Powell outlined the conditions for an acceptable government: legalize all political activity, free political prisoners, call for free elections, and the banning of Fidel and Raúl Castro. There is not a single word on the property issue, a delicate item that reappears later inside the text. The new report advises at the end 'to reassure the Cuban people that the US Government will not support any arbitrary effort to evict them from their homes'. Then it warns that 'action on confiscated property is best postponed until a fully legitimate democratic government is elected'. In other words, it reverses the order of priority given in Title II of H-B where the condition of restitution is

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<sup>115</sup> From 2003 to 2006 he served in the House, becoming a Senator filling the vacancy of Jon Corzine, who became Governor.

placed before the new government is recognized as democratic and worthy of the lifting of the US embargo.<sup>116</sup>

However, just in case, facing the prospects of a renewed effort by the US Congress sector that has been pressing to end the embargo, a further plan to re-codify the recommendation enshrined in the reports of the Commission took the shape of the so-called Cuba Transition Act. Introduced by Senator John Ensign (R-NV) and co-sponsored by Senator Mel Martínez and others, failed to be considered by Congress before adjourning for the August recess.<sup>117</sup> Senator Martínez held a press conference as soon as Castro's illness was announced in which he stated that Helms-Burton 'does not speak as to a person, but speaks as to an attitude of the Cuban government'. He added that once 'the Cuban government begins the process of transitioning... the conditions are also in Helms-Burton to begin a process for us to reciprocate in kind'. Close readers of Helms-Burton would detect a contradiction in this statement, because the text explicitly prohibits the presence of Fidel or Raúl Castro in any future Cuban government. Martínez further ventured that the United States 'should not feel constrained by Helms-Burton, which is now a decade-old piece of legislation... we could act at any moment to enact new legislation'.<sup>118</sup> Similar contradiction could be detected when Assistant Secretary of State Thom Shannon reminded in a press conference held on 23 August the offer made by President Bush to lift the embargo: 'free political prisoners, respect human rights -- especially those rights most important for the effective exercise of democracy -- ... permit the creation of independent organizations such as political parties, trade unions, civic associations that were dominated by the state,... to create a mechanism and a pathway towards elections'. Having met these conditions, 'we would look in consultation with our Congress for ways to lift the embargo and begin a deeper engagement with the Cuban state'.<sup>119</sup> In other words, the United States could consider lifting the embargo without Cuban meeting one of the key conditions of Title II of Helms-Burton, that any future government in transition should not include either Fidel or Raúl Castro.

Legal experts may comment that although for a new legislation to be in place, the old one does not have to be repealed (only the latest would supersede the old one), it would odd if Helms-Burton, as a codification of the embargo, is then contradicted by fragments of a new legislation dealing with specific items. In any event, and in spite of all optimistic hope, prospects of an energized life of Martínez's new bill in the fall, close to elections, are slim, in addition to the uncertainty created by the Castro's crisis. Same can be said of Shannon's offer while midterm legislative elections were approaching. These moves only dramatize further that the legal maze of the embargo measures are closely linked with not only the political aims of different interests, but also with the economic objectives of others.

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<sup>116</sup> The literature on the Cuban Revolution is immense, of different value and point of views. For a sample of analysis as to how and why Fidel Castro came to power and then the break with the United States erupted partially as a result of the action-reaction over sugar quotas and expropriations, see first the analysis on the cultural and social environment previous to Castro's take over, by Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1999). For an overall panorama of the contemporary history of Cuba and the Revolution, see Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution* (Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1993).

<sup>117</sup> Press Release, Mel Martínez office, 4/VIII/4, 2006.

<sup>118</sup> 'Senator Martinez holds a news conference on Cuba', CQ Transcripts Wire, *The Washington Post*, 1/VIII/2006.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Shannon, 'US Policy Toward Cuba', Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, DC, 23/VIII/2006, <http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/71065.htm>; Lauren Monsen, 'Slow-Motion Transfer of Power', *News from Washington*, 23/VIII/2006, <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060823175843GLnesnoM1.052493e-02>; see also press reports: Lesley Clark, 'US: Democracy could end embargo', *The Miami Herald*, 24/VIII/2006.

In consequence, with Title III frozen, IV simply as a theoretical threat to deny visas, and II demoted (Title I is a simple introductory declaration), what is left of the codification of the embargo? Seasoned observers and scholars have an answer: nothing. That is why the Commission vanished Helms-Burton from the web space. Meanwhile, as soon as the news of the Castro's illness were announced, numerous editorials and columns calling for the end of the embargo appeared in newspapers of Europe and the United States, authored not only by usual critics in the cradle of the Cuban exile community,<sup>120</sup> but by a wide spectrum of ideological inclinations that even included, among other US media, *The Wall Street Journal*,<sup>121</sup> and internationally, London's *Financial Times*.<sup>122</sup>

During the first days of Castro's crisis, President Bush had a golden opportunity to end the embargo and challenge Raúl with an offer he could not refuse. However, after advising the Cuban leadership to act fast towards democracy, he warned that the United States would take note of whoever placed obstacles on the path to a democratic transition. But the message was also dressed with moderation considering the circumstances, inviting the Cuban people to work together for a democratic change, words that were echoed by Secretary of State Rice. In addition, he later advised the Cuban exiles to put off the question of restitution of property until a fully democratic government is in place. The most explicit decision made by the US government were clear signs that Washington was priming the national interest and the security of the country, keeping the plans of the exile community in the backburner. As a confirmation of this cautious and realistic attitude, Senator Mel Martínez had an unusual presentation for a gathering of his colleagues in the Peter Pan operation, when he advised the representatives of the exiles that came to the United States as children escaping from Cuba's communism in the early 60s, of having extreme 'patience' in dealing with the stalemate created by Castro's illness, waiting for a clear outcome that may take months.<sup>123</sup> Simultaneously, Alfredo Durán, a former president of the association of veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion force, and a leader of the moderate centrist sector of the exile community, considered as erroneous a US policy of refusing to have a dialogue que Raúl Castro.<sup>124</sup>

As first measure taken after the crisis erupted, the White House announced the confirmation of the immigration policy within the legal framework and numbers (about 21,000 per year), priming family ties, and stressing that illegal migration was not going to be tolerated.<sup>125</sup> As a collateral message and a threat directed to Venezuela's Chávez, the plan included an expansion of asylum spots reserved for Cuban doctors working as volunteers in Latin America. Several sectors of the exile community did not receive well this news, labeling the new reformatted strategy as opportunist and an offering of an escape valve to Raúl Castro.<sup>126</sup> In addition, confidential reports indicated that military plans were in place to stop a remake of the Mariel of the 1994 boat migration by sheer force of the US Navy, while ground forces would occupy some keys off Cuba mainland to convert them into transitory detentions.

These signs of prudence were replicated when on Sunday, 13 August, significantly Castro's birthday, the Cuban media printed photographs of him while recovering, along a signed message,<sup>127</sup> and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez arrived in Havana to spend the day. In addition to this, Raúl Castro reappeared in public receiving the Venezuelan

<sup>120</sup> Alejandro Armengol, 'Cambiar la Helms-Burton', *El Nuevo Herald*, 7/VIII/2006.

<sup>121</sup> 4/VIII/2006.

<sup>122</sup> 3/VIII/2006.

<sup>123</sup> 'Senador Martinez urges patience over Cuba', *The Miami Herald*, 16/VIII/2006.

<sup>124</sup> Barbara Celis, 'Negarse a dialogar con Fidel o Raúl es casi como ser mudo', *El País*, 16/VIII/2006.

<sup>125</sup> Nancy San Martín, Lesley Clark and Alfonso Charly, 'US to ease visa policy for Cubans', 9/VIII/2006; Elena Bauzá, 'Cambios migratorios para los cubanos', *Diario las Américas*, 13/VIII/2006; Rui Ferreira, 'Cambios en la política migratoria', *El Nuevo Herald*, 8/VIII/2006.

<sup>126</sup> Soren Triff, 'EEUU ofrece "válvula de escape" a Raúl Castro', *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/VIII/2006.

<sup>127</sup> *Juventud Rebelde*, 'Me siento muy feliz', 13/VIII/2006, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/>

president at the airport.<sup>128</sup> The highly publicized meeting and gift exchange in Castro's hospital room generated word-wide commentaries and interpretations regarding not only his health<sup>129</sup> but also the actual role played by his brother Raúl. Significantly, editorials of major Spanish newspapers had extreme critical evaluation of what was perceived as a 'spectacle' and a sign that nothing substantial had changed.<sup>130</sup> Castro's temporary successor went back into obscurity to reappear again in a interview on the Granma newspaper where he combined warnings against foreign intervention, reassurances that things were normal in Cuba, and a guarded offer of dialogue to the United States on equal footing.<sup>131</sup> Speculation increased regarding Raúl's realistic chances to reinforce his temporary power and chances of inheriting the influence enjoyed by his brother for almost half a century.<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, the US government announced the creation of a joint job to coordinate the intelligence functions for Cuba and Venezuela, with the resulting irritation of the Venezuelan regime and a degree of humor emanating from President Chávez.<sup>133</sup>

However, the overall cautionary approach coming from Washington reflected the fear of the US government facing a frenzy of retaliation and plans to demand the return of expropriated properties. This perception would trigger the expected exploitation by the Castro regime of the anxiety of the Cuban people for future eviction of their current dwellings. Groups and individuals in the exile community rushed to clarify that there was not the intention of the potential returnees to force the current tenants to leave. While attorneys advising the US companies that had their business expropriated considered that innovative solutions (such as using US aid funds to compensate former owners) could be explored, individual former owners expressed intentions to receive either compensation or restitution for rural and urban properties, but to the exclusion of residences.<sup>134</sup>

In an unrelated development to the crisis generated by the Castro's illness, a latent pending issue closely linked to the controversy of the expropriations came suddenly to the surface when the US patent and trademark office ruled that the Cuban government could not claim any rights to the Havana Club rum brand in the United States because its registration had expired. In turn, that means that Bacardí, the rum empire that bought the US rights from the original Arechabala family, can claim to be entitled to market in the United States a made in Puerto Rico Havana Club product, opening for a world wide competition with the product made and marketed by a partnership forged by the Cuban government and the French company Pernaud Ricard.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Rui Ferreira, 'Raúl recibe a Chávez', *El Nuevo Herald*, 14/VIII/2006.

<sup>129</sup> *The Miami Herald*, 'Turning 80, ailing Fidel vows to "fight"', 14/VIII/2006; AFP, 'Cubans get an eyeful of Castro recuperating', *The Miami Herald*, 15/VIII/2006; EFE, 'Castro aparece en cama', 15/VIII/2006.

<sup>130</sup> *El País*, 'Autoretrato', 15/VIII/2006; *El Mundo*, 'El crepúsculo de un tirano', 15/VIII/2006.

<sup>131</sup> Lázaro Barredo Medina, 'No enemy can defeat us', *Granma Internacional*, 18/VIII/2006; Nancy San Martín, 'Raúl Castro hints at readiness for dialogue with Washington', *The Miami Herald*, 19/VIII/2006; Rui Ferreira, 'El Castro "light" da su primera entrevista', *The Miami Herald*, 19/VIII/2006; Ariel Remos, 'Raúl rompió el silencio', *Diario las Américas*, 19/VIII/2006; Mauricio Vicent, 'Raúl Castro movilizó al Ejército cubano al enfermar su hermano', *El País*, 19/VIII/2006.

<sup>132</sup> Among the literature that received a sudden attention was the recent book (with special attention to Raúl) published by Brian Latell, a former CIA expert with over years of experience on Cuban affairs, *After Fidel* (Palgrave/MacMillan, New York, 2005). Among the classic biographies of Castro, the book by Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (Avon, New York, 1987), is specially recommended.

<sup>133</sup> AFP, 'EEUU nombra un "jefe" de inteligencia especial para Cuba y Venezuela', 19/VIII/2006. Jack Patrick Maher, the interim director of the new post, was immediately called 'Jack, the Ripper' by Chávez, adding this nickname to 'Condolencia' (for Secretary of State Rice) and 'Mr Danger' (a character in Rómulo Gallegos' novel *Doña Bárbara*) as a reference to President Bush.

<sup>134</sup> Barbara Celis, 'El exilio de Miami echa cuentas', *El País*, 9/VIII/2006; *Encuentro*, 'La enfermedad de Castro reaviva la discusión sobre el tema de las expropiaciones', 10/VIII/2006; Randy Nieves-Ruiz, AFP, 'EEUU podría terminar pagando las expropiaciones', *Diario las Américas*, 10/VIII/2006.

<sup>135</sup> Elaine Walker, 'Bacardí wins 10-year war over Havana favorite', *The Miami Herald*, 8/VIII/2006; EFE, 'Ron Havana Club se venderá en Florida', *Diario las Américas*, 9/VIII/2006; Jenny Wiggins, 'Bacardí seeks global rights to Havana Club', *Financial Times*, 9/VIII/2006; Elaine Walker, 'A rumble over rum', *The Miami Herald*, 8/VIII/2006.

## 9. Cuba Snubs the EU, Rediscovered Latin America

Returning to the evolution of the EU-Cuba relationship, as referred above, and in spite of the evident lack of progress of the Cuban human rights record, the EU decided on 12 June 2006, to continue with the parameters of its policy towards Cuba, framed on the 1996 Common Position (to be reviewed every six months) and the extension of the suspension of the June 2003 measures. The new Conclusions, as usual, were not free of harsh language against Cuban policies and behavior. The text 'deplored the further deterioration of the human rights situation', 'noted that the number of political prisoners had risen' (to more than 330), 'urged to unconditional release of all political prisoners', pointing out 'concern' for 'several dozen acts of violent harassment and intimidation, and 'that the government had rolled back reforms leading to a tentative economic opening'. The Council finally announced 'to start working on a mid-and long-term strategy on Cuba'.<sup>136</sup> Exile organizations and human rights groups expressed dissatisfaction with the continuation of the EU approach.<sup>137</sup> The Cuban government blasted the EU with a new round of protests for the decision, calling the announcement a sign of 'pathetic' alliance with the United States, and labeling the EU as a 'lackey' of President Bush,<sup>138</sup> arguments that were already advanced by the Cuban government in the context of the IV Summit of European Union. Latin America-Caribbean held in Vienna.<sup>139</sup>

The Cuban government's assessment of an alleged coalition formed by the EU and Washington could in a way be backed by remembering the fact that the US presidents Clinton and Bush have been suspending every six months Title III to the point that it ceased to be news, and sometimes was hidden in irrelevant pages of newspapers, but dutifully reported by the Cuban media.<sup>140</sup> On top of that, the US government has been basically complying with the agreement made with the EU for not trying to harass European businesses that for one reason or another may have deals related to the formerly expropriated properties. While from time to time there have been news about attempts to deny visas to executives of Spanish companies, and some had legal expenses related to threats in that direction, no news have erupted that would signal a potential trade war.

In this context, Spanish companies did not seem to be under special pressure. Sol Meliá announced that it was establishing a joint venture for a chain of 'Floridita' bars in Europe, under a system of franchising. The same company has expanded its operations in Cuba. While divesting itself of hotels in the Canary Islands, it has invested further in Cuba, where 30% of all tourists who visit the country stay in Sol Meliá hotels. Globally, during the first quarter of 2006, the chain experienced a gain in profits of 55.6% over the same period the year before.<sup>141</sup>

At the same time Cuba has been able to afford to antagonize European interests. It has enjoyed the luxury of rejecting development aid, equalizing the demands of conditions imposed by Brussels and different European governments with the historical pressure applied by the United States. Subsequently, Castro had obviously rediscovered additional dimensions in the more ample Latin American continent. Considering the Caribbean as too narrow for its operations, Cuba embarked on a strategy that is intimately linked to an

<sup>136</sup> Council Conclusion, External Relations, 12/VI/2006.

<sup>137</sup> Reporters without Borders, 'Dismay at the European Union's decision not to reimpose Cuba sanctions', 14/VI/2006.

<sup>138</sup> Ariel Remos, 'Arremete el régimen castrista contra la UE', *Diario las Américas*, 24/VI/2006.

<sup>139</sup> Pablo Alfonso, 'Cuba arremete contra la Unión Europea', *El Nuevo Herald*, 15/VI/2006.

<sup>140</sup> *Granma*, 'Bush postpones application of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act', 18/VII/2006.

<sup>141</sup> See: <http://www.hechosdehoy.com/articulo.asp?idarticulo=8812>, A.N., 'Sol Meliá se reorganiza para potenciar el negocio inmobiliario', *El País*, 12/VII/2006; Mauricio Vicent, 'El 30% de los turistas que visitan Cuba se alojan en hoteles de Sol Meliá', *El País*, 29/VI/2006.

unexpected ally –Venezuela. It also began its infiltration of MERCOSUR, a subregional organization that some years ago seemed to have objectives to be too economic and capitalist for Castro's taste. Slowly but tenaciously, Castro has turned to be the most solid ally of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. In his company, Cuba began to act as a *de facto* member of MERCOSUR, when Venezuela left the Andean Community, and right after defecting became an instant member of the Southern Cone regional integration network. Attending the trade pact's gathering in Córdoba, Argentina, Castro signed an Agreement of Economic Complementarity (ACE) by which Cuba will be able to purchase some 2,700 products at advantageous tariffs and prices. Meanwhile, Venezuela, the new star member of MERCOSUR, provides 98,000 barrels of oil to Cuba at a price one third below the market. In return, Castro lends 30,000 doctors for Chávez's social programmes.

Although political and economic observers have been scratching their heads regarding the feasibility of not only Cuba's effective linkage with MERCOSUR, but also about the outcome of Venezuela's performance in a group where Brazil is already showing signs of uneasiness, the fact is that no one has been to correct the political validity of either Chávez's or Castro's bold statements. While the Venezuelan strongman has vowed that with his country's entry, a new and different MERCOSUR has been born, Castro ventured that Cuba can become a member any time he wishes. In any event, the fact remains that Cuba has changed course in prioritizing the scenarios Castro needs to face, once more in time, the power of the United States.

Simultaneously, on a terrain that is equally important for Europe and the United States, significant developments erupted signaling either a considerable erosion of the embargo pressure or precise movements to eliminate it altogether, besides the subtle textual maneuvers mentioned above. What are the main reasons for the apparent change of world priorities for Cuba in seeking support and new scenarios for its economic and political ventures? What could be the subject that links both phenomena –the weakening of the embargo and the expanded field of operations for Cuba in Latin America with hands tied to Venezuela? The answer is simple: oil. More precisely, it is not only the oil wealth enjoyed by Venezuela, but the discovery of important potential reserves in Cuban waters very close to the United States.

For the time, the European and Canadian interests seem to have an advantage, a situation that is obviously due to the embargo banning. But things may change in the near future if the US oil companies apply as much energy in circumventing the US legislation as the food producing states have been investing with the result of profiting from this loophole that allows certain US companies to sell goods to Cuba under the humanitarian exception. The whole story began when Cuba ceased to be a totally barren land in oil reserves and production. Since 1971, when with the help of the Soviets, oil reserves were discovered off Varadero, Cuba has managed to cover about 40% of its consumption with this rather heavy and of poor quality oil, prompting Castro to rely on Venezuela to fill in for the vanishing of imports from the defunct Soviet Union. But in 2004, the Spanish-Argentine conglomerate Repsol-YPF began to make perforation of rich reserves just about 20 miles off the Cuban north coast. Subsequently Repsol entered a partnership with CUPET (Cuba oil company) and Norwegian HYDRO and India's ONGC Videsh.<sup>142</sup>

Consequently, US congressmen favoring the hardening of the embargo retaliated by presenting legislation and pressure to deny visas to executives of the oil companies, in a variation of the application of Title IV of the Helms-Burton legislation, under the justification that oil exploration so close to the Florida coast would be environmentally damaging. They were faced by equally energetic colleagues in Congress, Rep. Jeff Flake,

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<sup>142</sup> Mauricio Vicent, 'Repsol comparte riesgos en Cuba con dos nuevos socios extranjeros', *El País*, 24/V/2006.

R-Arizona, and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, introducing a bill that would exempt oil exploration and trade from the embargo. While experts warn that discovery of oil reserves does not guarantee its fast refining and marketing, not to speak about its use in Cuba itself, the danger for US interests is to be one day totally absent in his new development. Meanwhile, Castro is consolidating its intimate link with Venezuela.<sup>143</sup>

The consensus in both sides of the Atlantic regarding the attitude to be taken or already in motion with the expected Cuban transition or succession (depending of the corresponding political inclinations and realism) includes as part of the common denominator the prevalent sentiment of a wait and see tactic. However, all the agreement ends here, because for the US government and the hard sector of the Cuban exile community the code to be followed is enshrined, as we have seen above, in the report of the transition commission or in fragments of the embargo legislation still valid, such as Title II of the Helm-Burton act.

With the panorama of mutual attitudes as outlined above, the EU structure and most European governments went into the usual slowdown for the summer vacation (only to be disturbed considerably by the Lebanon crisis) for studying the drafting of a strategy towards Cuba. Although there is the possibility of a hardening of the conditions imposed, in case that the Castro government would like to enjoy an extension of the 'constructive dialogue' offered, the reasonable and cautionary approach is the maintenance of the existing scope and language.

#### **10. The Eclipse of the Patriarch**

In this context, the 31 July stunning news of Castro's illness and temporary retirement from power hit the EU dormant institutions preparing for the summer break and most influential governments on the Cuban issues with surprise. In contrast with the vocal reactions generated in the exile community and the echoing made by the US government with certain restraint and a subtle warning to both sides for not provoking any kind of unusual migration, the EU institutional structure offered a subdued message of observation.

Although customary statements were expected for expressing diplomatic wishes for a fast recovery, there was a polite silence regarding the political evolution of the regime. No explicit declarations of (unnecessary) support for the temporary heir were detected. In some countries where Cuban affairs have become in recent years a domestic issue, such as the notorious case of Spain, the expected gentle diplomatic comments made by high officials were met by a round of critical evaluations by the opposition.

In general, it is safe to say that a consensus of caution developed showing that no political faction of sector wanted to be on record as contributing to the worsening of the situation. With the exception of the vocal commentaries made by second level figures of the PP and the leadership of Izquierda Unida (defending the 'conquests' of the Castro revolution), the attitude in Spain was prudent and respectful. Any other more active pattern could be interpreted as meddling in the internal matters of a country in a delicate situation. In more concrete terms, Spain's foreign minister Miguel Angel Moratinos wished the recovery to Castro, while Spain's ambassador in Havana, Carlos Alonso Zaldívar, in Havana reiterated that the future of Cuba will be determined 'by Cubans and only by Cubans'. The PSOE spokesman in the Spanish Parliament was unusually blunt when he shared his party's wish for Cuba 'to direct itself towards full democracy, that today does not exist', and that process should be done 'without external interfering of any sort'. For its part, the

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<sup>143</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, 'Should the US break its Cuba trade embargo?', 27/VII/2006.

PP representatives called the Castro regime 'an hereditary dictatorship' and demanded of the Spanish government a clear message to Cuba for betting for a pacific transition'.<sup>144</sup>

On the business and tourism front, reactions to Castro's illness news were prudent and did not show any noticeable concern for changes. While plans for tourist travel to Cuba were not affected in the heavy season of the month of August, business sectors evaluated as secured important investments made in Cuba, still under the impact of the apparent strategy executed in 2005 by the Cuban government for priming large companies instead of small and medium enterprises. It was then recorded that 99 joint businesses were cancelled and 67 were scheduled to be terminated.<sup>145</sup> However, the new crisis did not seem to raise fears in the important Spanish businesses established in Cuba. Trade balance in 2005 was extremely positive for Spain: while Cuba sold €137.8 million of goods to Spain, it imported €488 million. More than 200 small and medium enterprises from Spain still operate in Cuba, while large conglomerates such as Melià, Altadis, and Repsol show an increase in the activities in the hotel and tobacco and oil exploration industries.<sup>146</sup>

It is in this pragmatic and market-oriented context where the current state of the relations between Spain and Cuba take a new profile facing the uncertainties posed by the Castro's illness and impasse. Reflecting a wide range of analytical approach by a number of scholars and think-tank staff, samples of documents stress that there was never the intention of the 'creative and critical engagement and dialogue' with Cuba to generate a change of regime, but still a sense of dissatisfaction exists in the minds of the high echelons of the Spanish government. Facing this dilemma, under the accusation of the PP that the open dialogue policy espoused by the PSOE-led administration, two alternatives are presented, further dramatized in the new panorama presented after 31 July. The first is a return to the policy of the subtle and vocal policy of pressure applied in the last years of the Aznar administration and most especially from mid 2003 to mid 2004. It is valued as unrealistic and it would mean that in order to be coherent it should also to be applied to varied regimes that violate human rights equally or worse than in Cuba. The alternative of a withdrawal of an active policy towards Cuba is contrary to the historical links. However, while Spain is probably the country in the world that has the highest number of experts in a variety of Cuban fields, there is not a definite policy and strategy towards Cuba that matches intimate links that unite both civil societies (or traces of it).<sup>147</sup> The time may have come, in view of the novel panorama posed by the expectations towards a real transition, for the construction of an individualized approach to a new Cuba. This may be perfectly in tune with a new EU attitude.

## 11. The EU Wish Castro and Cuban Democracy a Speedy Recovery

EU spokesmen and other anonymous staff members reaffirmed a scrupulous policy of caution, coinciding with one of the strategies expressed by the US government on the need to avoid any source of a chaotic development that would provoke a massive exodus. Reminding observers that the EU had agreed to draft a long-term strategy paper, this was seen now even more difficult than before the Castro crisis, with countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia pressuring for a position closer to the United State attitude. In spite of the persuasion executed by Spain, the Cuban govern has shown 'an incapacity or unwillingness to evolve toward democracy'. In spite of this, the EU will be

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<sup>144</sup> *El País*, 2/VIII/2006.

<sup>145</sup> José María Tríper, 'El giro político de Castro "expulsó" de Cuba a las pymes españolas', *Expansión*, 13/VI/2005.

<sup>146</sup> Noemí Navas, 'Sin miedo a la muerte del comandante', *Cinco Días*, 5/VIII/2006.

<sup>147</sup> Francesc Bayo and Christian Freres, 'Potencialidades y límites de las relaciones entre España y Cuba.

Una perspectiva española', paper presented at the Latin American Studies (LASA) Meeting held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 15-18/III/2006.

always ready to help the Cuban people 'in the event that it asks for assistance'. However, the EU does not wish the Cuban regime 'to succeed itself'. Given a choice, Brussels would like to be able to work with the most moderate sector of the Cuban government, but it does not hold high hopes for a China solution, because Cuba 'does not have the economic capacity and its geographical closeness to the United States' is a factor to consider. The consensus to be built is then to maintain the communication channels open with the government and the opposition. It is taken for granted that the drafting of a new position would irritate the government, because the EU has not declared a common position on any other Latin American country. But Brussels is conscious that it has to send a clear message to Cuba and the exiles, in addition of the fact that it has given the country around €145 billion in assistance since 1993.<sup>148</sup> However, the spokesman of the European Commission Pietro Petrucci made the most innovative and explicit statement. He surprised and amused the Brussels-accredited press by stating that 'the EU desires to President Castro and Cuban democracy a speedy recovery'.<sup>149</sup>

For his part, Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, advises 'serenity' and expressed his hope for a transition that should be 'acceptable and correct'. The EU Council staff worked during the month of August on a draft for the new strategy document, but it was not expected to be discussed until the first External Relations meeting at the beginning of September under the EU presidency held by Finland.<sup>150</sup> The EU Parliament was not in session while its most important representatives regarding relations with Latin America were in Colombia meeting with their counterparts of several integration systems in the formation of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly.

In any event, still taking into account the new variable inserted by the Castro's illness and temporary withdrawal from active power, some standing pieces should be part of the analysis and have considerable place in the framing of the new strategy. First, the fact remains that the lack of consensus within the EU is not reduced to one country (Spain that wishes to move into a given direction for reasons of historical linkages, political and economic concerns, and the rest that seem not to have a special stake on Cuba. According to a keen analysis provided by Madrid-based Susanne Gratius, the line up can be subdivided into four teams: (1) the advocates of human rights (Northern Europe and the Netherlands), with a policy on Cuba based on principles; (2) the 'engaged' (Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal), favoring dialogue and discarding the conflictive measures imposed in 2003; (3) the 'atlanticists' (the UK, Germany and Austria), critical of Cuba, an issue not worth a conflict with the United States; and (4) the 'hardliners' (the new members from Eastern Europe, led by the Czech Republic), favoring sanctions, in line with US policy).<sup>151</sup> While each sector will exercise its own influence, the final approach will have to reflect the considerable weight of the conservative majority of the European Parliament.

However, the final shape of resolutions and positions generated by the Council do not necessarily reflect the results of an open vote, but also reveal the energy and pressure applied by some specific members. The same way that the Common Position decided in 1996 was a reflection of the individual role played by Spain under the leadership of Aznar, nowadays it is also the Spanish government that takes the front seat. While the Cuban issue gives an opportunity to Spanish parties to use it as a domestic topic, the behavior of the Castro regime also gives an excuse to countries that have no direct stake on Cuba. Whether one likes a specific policy of a given country or not, the objective cultural and

<sup>148</sup> Andreu Missé, 'La UE apuesta por el consenso', *El País*, 4/VIII/2006.

<sup>149</sup> Enrique López, 'La UE pide la recuperación de la democracia', *La Razón*, 3/VIII/2006.

<sup>150</sup> Antonio Delgado, EFE, 'La UE prepara una estrategia', 4/VIII/2006.

<sup>151</sup> Susanne Gratius, '¿Es la Posición Común de la UE sobre Cuba una estrategia válida?', FRIDE, July 2006.

historical close links enjoyed by some (such is the case of Spain) make them irreplaceable partners for actions in a pre-transition strategy. This is the reason why seasoned observers have already pointed out that in the context of the need for the United States to seek the help of Europe and Latin America, Bush has now a golden opportunity to reformat the badly damaged relationship with Spain's Rodríguez Zapatero and join efforts in addressing the sensitive issue of Cuba.<sup>152</sup>

This current panorama leaves the EU with three instruments to be used dealing with Havana: a conditioned political dialogue, economic and tourism links, and development aid. Until the Castro's crisis, it was obvious that the first and the third were rejected by the Cubans, leaving only the second that is actually shared by all the European actors. The new scene available by the crisis presents the question about with whom in Cuba the European interests will deal. The enigma resides on knowing if the military will be running the show and effectively as they have been in recent years controlling most of the state enterprises. As with most things related to the Europe-Cuba relationship, only time will say if the approach was correct or doomed to failure as the historical US embargo policy.

As a reflection of the special attitude of Spain on Cuba, it was not surprising that, after recovering from the stunning news, the Spanish press reacted with considerable commentaries and analysis, incorporating a wide range of views from insiders, residents, and foreign writers, with due priority given to Cubans in Miami, Spain and even in Cuba itself, some under the cover of pseudonyms.<sup>153</sup> An exceptional piece was published by US ambassador in Madrid, Eduardo Aguirre, a Houston businessman of Cuban birth, named by Bush to deal with the sensitive US-Spain relations after the war in Iraq.<sup>154</sup> Editorials in the mainstream press offered a notable consensus with an impressive absence of any kind words for a regime that appeared to be with no future. Expressions using a systematic labeling of 'dictatorship' were not limited to the conservative and middle of the way press, but they were used prominently in newspapers with progressive and moderate leftist inclinations. In this context, observers will find it very useful the constant updating of the digital edition of the journal *Encuentro*, published in Madrid. Although designed and managed by Cubans, it incorporates views of Latin American and Spanish writers.<sup>155</sup> The nature of the 'biological change' was stressed heavily, while blame for the uncertainty of the future was placed on Castro's resistance to change and reform.<sup>156</sup>

'Eclipse of the patriarch' was the innovative title of an editorial of the influential of Madrid's *El País*, in which a generalized Spanish opinion was summarized outlining some of the reasons for the survival of the regime: the extraordinary internal conditions of Cuba, its

<sup>152</sup> Andrés Oppenheimer, 'Estados Unidos y el cambio de guardia en Cuba', *El Nuevo Herald*, 6/VIII/2006; 'US should lay low on Cuba', *The Miami Herald*, 6/VIII/2006.

<sup>153</sup> For sample of my own comments, see: 'Bush, davant la incògnita Raúl Castro', *Avui*, 3/VIII/2006, <http://www.avui.cat/cgi-bin/resultat?http://www.avui.cat/avui/diari/06/ago/02/237569.htm>; 'La muerte de Franco y la crisis de Fidel', *Diario Correo*, Bilbao, 3/VIII/2006, <http://www.elcorreodigital.com/vizcaya/pg060803/prensa/noticias/Internacional/200608/03/VIZ-MUN-145.html>; 'Los enigmas de la transición cubana', *El País*, 3/VIII/2006, [http://www.elpais.es/articuloCompleto/opinion/enigmas/transicion/cubana/elpepiopi/20060803elpepiopi\\_5/Tes/](http://www.elpais.es/articuloCompleto/opinion/enigmas/transicion/cubana/elpepiopi/20060803elpepiopi_5/Tes/); 'El embargo: la patata caliente para Raúl Castro', *Cinco Días*, 4/VIII/2006, [http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/embargo/patata/caliente/Raul/Castro/cdscli/20060804cdscliopi\\_5/Tes/](http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/opinion/embargo/patata/caliente/Raul/Castro/cdscli/20060804cdscliopi_5/Tes/); 'Cuba, ¿qué vendrá ahora', *Nueva Mayoría*, 4/VIII/2006, <http://www.nuevamayoria.com/ES/ANALISIS/?id=roy&file=060802.html>; 'Cuba, y ahora ¿qué?', *La Opinión de los Angeles*, 6/VIII/2006, <http://www.laopinion.com/comentarios/?rkey=0000000000000373480>; 'El embargo, la oportunidad única', *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana*, 4/VIII/2006 (EN 060804), [http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/encuentro\\_en\\_la\\_red/cuba/cuba\\_hacia\\_donde\\_y\\_como\\_se\\_abre\\_una\\_opor\\_tunidad\\_unica/\(page\)/2](http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/encuentro_en_la_red/cuba/cuba_hacia_donde_y_como_se_abre_una_opor_tunidad_unica/(page)/2)

<sup>154</sup> 'El futuro de Cuba', *La Razón*, 3/VIII/2006, reproduced in other newspapers, it was strategically published by *The Miami Herald*, 'US ready to help Cubans in rebuilding their country', 10/VIII/2006.

<sup>155</sup> See website: [www.cubaencuentro.com](http://www.cubaencuentro.com)

<sup>156</sup> 'El "final biológico" del castrismo', *ABC*, 2/VIII/2006; 'La lenta agonía del castrismo se acerca a su final', *El Mundo*, 2/VIII/2006; 'El futuro de Cuba', *La Vanguardia*, 2/VIII/2006.

proximity to the United States, the US embargo that rendered cohesion to the Castro strategy, internal mobilization with the opposition rudely controlled, and most recently Castro's popular prestige in Latin America reinforced by a wave of populism. However, the editorial ended by assessing that 'Castroism without Castro' is unfeasible, and it is in the interest of all actors to contribute so that the process now open be pacific and controlled by all Cubans. It added that the Cuban Communist party and the White House agree on the need to avoid chaos and a possible migratory avalanche.<sup>157</sup> Reflecting what may be a fitting epitaph, and depending on future developments, another editorial of *El País* considered the temporary disappearance as an 'irreversible event', with lasting consequences. This feeling was widely shared by influential columnist and observers in Europe, Latin America and the United States.<sup>158</sup> It is for this reason that it expressed a wide sense of opinion in Europe to call for prudence in the exile community, because there is going to be transition sooner or later. And efforts should be disposed to help for 'Castroism, after a violent trajectory, ends at least in a peaceful way, giving way to reconciliation and democracy'.<sup>159</sup>

## 12. Conclusion: Last and Least?

The relationship between the European Union and Cuba, sometimes under the leading role of Spain and the cameo appearances of other EU governments, most especially the Czech, went into a stalemate after the suspension of the measures imposed in 2003. The results expected from the reinstatement of a communications lines between the Cuban regime and European actors were not materialized regarding an expansion of the release of political prisoners and other reform measures in the political behavior of the Castro government. The Cuban government seemed to be more interested in concrete tactics to obtain some specific benefits (such as a positive vote in the UN Human Rights Commission) and in its insistence in demonstrating that it would welcome any kind of conditioned assistance.

While this overall strategy was not a novelty and it faithfully matched past behavior, it was further dramatized when apparently the diplomatic movements taken by Havana took a definite Latin American turn when Castro forged an alliance with Venezuela. The swap of social services given by Cuba and the oil provided by Chávez made the difference. The new setting was then choreographed by the attendance of Castro (a first in months to any international gathering) to the debut of Hugo Chávez in MERCOSUR, after he suddenly decided to leave the Andean Community. When this new trend seemed to disturb lightly the stalemate of the EU-Cuba relations and the Brussels establishment had decided to draft a new strategy towards Cuba to complete the existing Common Position of 2003, the illness and temporary retirement of Fidel Castro forced all actors, and most especially Spain in the case of the paper, to rethink their overall policies and ponder the appropriate actions to be taken.

The initial reactions and possible the nucleus of a future policy reflect the basic points of the Common Position and are precisely summarized in the words of the spokesman of the Commission: the EU wishes Castro and Cuban democracy a speedy recovery. This protocol attitude (mostly on the first item) and sentiment (directly linked to the second) is shared by most of the European governments, and most specifically by the Spanish, for reasons explained above. Once the enigma of Castro's health is clarified, the EU will address how to deal with the second political wish. While the consensus on this second aim is general, the different opinions on how to deal with its outcome will depend on the

<sup>157</sup> 'Eclipse del patriarca', *El País*, 2/VIII/2006.

<sup>158</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, 'El principio del fin', *El País*, 13/VIII/2006; Jorge Castañeda, 'What else ends with Castro', *Newsweek*, 21-28/VIII/2006; Carlos Alberto Montaner, 'Por qué el castrismo morirá con Castro', *El Nuevo Herald*, 13/VIII/2006; Mauricio Vicent, 'El invierno del comandante', *El País*, 13/VIII/2006.

<sup>159</sup> 'Cuba inquieta', 6/VIII/2006.

circumstances. In principle, it is expected that governments such as the Czech and the Polish will continue to recommend strategies closer to the US policy, but all depends too on the interests of Washington facing the evolution of Castro's health and the succession or transition routes.<sup>160</sup> Although it is not clear and hard to predict the actual shape of such cooperation, it is reassuring that in the framework envisioned by the State Department there is role to be played by the EU. Thomas Shannon, the US State Department's assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, was explicit in one of the rare references directly to the EU, in the course of a televised conference with an audience in Prague: 'The European Union and other members of the global community can play an important role in helping Cuba make a transition to democracy'.<sup>161</sup> Meanwhile, it is expected that Brussels will recommend a high degree of caution. In the first place, because it is too late to change the historical attitude towards Cuba, on the grounds that it has not failed, but only has caused a certain degree of frustration. Only time will say if the decision to maintain close communication with the Cuban government and people was the correct choice. Only when Cuba is fully under a democratic government and the people are able to freely express opinions, can judgment be rendered on the goodness of the European attitude compared with the US policy.

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<sup>160</sup> As a first instance of this, former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski called for the formation of a 'round table' on Cuba, designed to open a dialogue with the government, to which he planned to invite former Czech President Vaclav Havel, former US Secretary of State Colin Powell and former German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer (EFE, 22/VIII/2006).

<sup>161</sup> Eric Green, 'Lifting Embargo on Cuba "Still on the Table", US Official', Washington, 18/VIII/2006, <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=200608181119581xeneerg8.555239e-02>