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photo by Pavel Hroch

CUBA WAITS FOR THE DAY AFTER

Edward McMillan-Scott

The autumn streets of Havana are dark at night. The few electric lights are reserved for the main highways. Side streets are lit only by the occasional patched-up pre-revolution Buick or Chevrolet, sometimes an open door throws neon light onto the pavement outside.

Cubans shuffle head down: many are starving, many ill, most literally dirt poor. They talk of a state of *miedo* – fear.

The only colour on the crumbling colonial buildings comes from political slogans extolling the 1957 revolution led by *Los Hermanos Castro* ('The Castro Brothers'). One is the dictator Fidel, dying from stomach cancer, the other his notoriously boozy brother Raul.

It was difficult finding the little house where the *Damas de Blanco* – Women in White – were waiting for me. They had been protesting outside their church that day about their husbands' and

sons' imprisonment in 2003 for crimes against the state. A token 75 political activists had been rounded up.

The Women were eager to talk, eager to know my opinion about what happens next in Cuba. I had come to find out, and to hear more of the conditions their menfolk were being kept in.

My visit to Cuba on a tourist visa was organised by Vaclav Havel's committee for democracy. I had come to examine



Edward McMillan-Scott with Osvaldo Payá

how the £100 million EU democracy fund I set up aimed at the transformation of the ex-Soviet bloc could help Cuba.

The Women told me of the unlit, fetid cells, the filthy food, the lack of medical care at prisons hundreds of miles from their families – and far from the remaining political activists in Havana.

The European Parliament awarded the Women the Sakharov Prize for freedom of expression in 2005: they could not collect it but their demonstrations are tolerated by the regime.

The same prize was awarded to Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá in 2002, just before the crackdown. His limited political activities too are tolerated, but he and his family are harassed. His 18-year-old daughter has just started university but she cannot make friends, as the other students are instructed to shun her.

Payá organised a mass petition in 2002, an extraordinarily difficult undertaking. He collected more than 11,000 signatures for the reform agenda known as the Varela Project calling for economic and political freedom which achieved international support.

Today, Paya is presenting his latest project. *Todos Cubanos* is a plan for the transition of Cuba from 50 years of dictatorship to real democracy. He shows me the myriad supporters' signatures but these days he cannot make mass appeals.

Martha Beatriz Roque, a more nationalistic and populist figure, has also produced a blueprint through her Civil Society Assembly. *"Promoting the Day After"* is a draft program for a Castro-free Cuba.

Conversation with Martha was difficult because the regime blasts her alleyway with pop music day and

night. In a corner, an aide was faxing press releases aimed at a Latin American diplomatic conference in Montevideo the following day.

The courage and determination of people like Paya and Roque is humbling to those who, like myself, tend to take Europe's freedom and prosperity for granted.

But Europe's history has a message for the world's remaining tyrannies – for China, Cuba, Egypt – even Russia, where democracy has now faltered.

The courage and determination of people like Paya and Roque is humbling to those who, like myself, tend to take Europe's freedom and prosperity for granted.

My visits in the last year to each of these countries, to meet political dissidents, religious activists and civil society actors have shown me how Europe's example holds more hope than America's dollars, let alone her divisions.

Such tyrannies are all following the same path, banning use of the Internet, imprisoning or killing dissidents, trying to control religious activity and stifling civil society. Their days are numbered, but I want the EU to do more to bring on the day after.

Edward McMillan-Scott is an MEP for Yorkshire & Humber (Conservative), European Parliament Vice President and founder of the EU Democracy and Human Rights Initiative

EDITORIAL

The transition towards democracy is often viewed as a power struggle, but it is, in a way, more a consequence of prepared minds and well-debated plans. This issue of Cuba-Europe Dialogues looks at Cubans' views and plans regarding transition. The past year has borne witness to a steady growth in debate on this topic within Cuba; perhaps in itself a far more significant development than anyone's stomachaches.

The outcome of the project All Cubans was made public last spring and is presented in the first article in our analysis. We have also asked several scientists and journalists from all around the world to reflect on these plans and contribute with a comparison. Fredo Arias King shows what Cubans have learned from Central European achievements and setbacks. Vojtech Cegl, former Judge at a Constitutional Court, analyses the Cuban constitutional draft and Carlos Alberto Montaner compares the paths taken by the Cubans and the Spanish.

The Cuban state of mind and expectations are depicted by Edward McMillan-Scott, European Parliament Vice-President, who recently visited Cuba. Among others, he helped present the Cuba-Europe Dialogues in Brussels and expresses his support to the NGO Network. Its growing activities and importance are captured by several articles and listings in the second part of this issue. I hope you will find the articles useful and we welcome your feedback.

Nikola Horejs
Editor

PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED: CUBAN PROGRAMS FOR A DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Nikola Horejš

According to one of the leaders of the Czech democratic movement in 1989, "When it comes to transition, the only experience is your experience." This feeling is shared by Cuban democrats. Even if they do not know what exactly to prepare for, they are getting ready for all possibilities.

Last year, two important groups in Cuba, Oswaldo Paya's *Movimiento Cristiano Liberacion* and Martha Beatriz Roque's *Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil en Cuba*, presented detailed ideas for Cuba's future. Although plans for a new constitution and a transitional government may seem premature, they might prove to be the most important developments in Cuba today. These ideas are not presented as finished products, but simply as other steps in a nationwide discussion. In the words of Oswaldo Payá: "Cubans used to wait for others to decide for them. The main idea behind the project is that Cubans abandon their learned helplessness and learn to express and discuss their own wishes and fears."

ALL CUBANS

All Cubans is a unique program in recent Cuban history that encourages debate and promotes results. "In 2003,

we had our working document, a draft of the plans for transition, but we said 'no,' Cubans do not need others to tell them what to do, they need to discuss it themselves," said Paya.

Oswaldo Paya's
Movimiento Cristiano
Liberacion and Martha
Beatriz Roque's
Asamblea presented
detailed ideas for Cuba's
future. This process might
prove to be the most
important development
in Cuba today.

Paya has gathered piles of handwritten comments from many Cubans, both within the country and in exile. These comments were anonymous and while some express political ideologies, others focus on wishes that have been suppressed for a long time. The resulting document includes a new constitution, electoral laws, and plans for tran-

sitional steps. It has grown to more than hundred and thirty pages and is written in a formal legal style, because, explained Paya, "a law should be the guarantee of justice in the transition, not a leader or movement." Although its extensive reach and complex style may render it impractical for the public at large, it clearly expresses the combined efforts of different political approaches.

Briefly, the All Cubans plan suggests these constitutional measures:

- 1) The All Cubans program will be approved by a referendum called by the current National Assembly in order to avoid any institutional turmoil.
- 2) A Contact Group will be formed in order to represent opposition forces and the current regime. The Contact Group will appoint a transitional government for a one year period.
- 3) The current constitution will be replaced by this plan, and in two years a new constitution will be drafted by a newly elected Assembly and will be approved in a referendum.
- 4) In one year, a new unicameral Assembly will be elected. It will then be dissolved once the new con-

stitution has been approved, which will be after a period of two years.

- 5) In one year, a new president will be elected in universal elections and will become the head of the government.

The plan also suggests that the once the transitional government has been appointed, it should take immediate steps to implement the following changes:

Political prisoners:

- 1) Free all political prisoners and review all other politically motivated and unjust sentences. Abolish the death penalty.

Reconciliation:

- 2) Dissolve the current communist party and the current communist youth organization. Legalize political pluralism.
- 3) Legalize all human rights groups and opposition movements and guarantee fundamental freedoms.

- 4) Establish Commissions of National Reconciliation across all levels of government. These civic organizations will guarantee that all of the transformational processes included in the plan lead to a reconciliation of all Cubans.

- 5) Replace all upper level judges with newly nominated experts.

Demilitarization:

- 6) The army will come under civilian control. Jobs in all public offices and the management of state-owned companies will no longer be compatible with active service in the army.
- 7) All police and army forces will carry on with their service, excluding political forces.

Other:

- 8) All Cubans living in exile, including their children, will be granted the right to Cuban citizenship, and will be allowed to participate in elections.

- 9) All Cubans will be guaranteed free healthcare and education. They will also have the right to live in the houses that they currently occupy. They will retain their property rights and will be protected from eviction.

- 10) State-owned media and important companies will not be privatized. Privatization of other state-owned property will not proceed under the transitional government and will not do so until proper laws are established.

- 11) Following the agricultural reforms outlined in this plan, small farmers and their cooperatives will receive property rights for the land they are using. Moreover, all restitutions of farmland will be made solely from state-owned land.

- 12) Cuban citizens will be able to file claims for property restitution in court. However, the decision regarding the form of property restitution will be left up to the new government.



photo by Pavel Hroch

Malecón

- 13) The Cuban government will negotiate its foreign debt and will make efforts to end US trade sanctions. The government will also attempt to regain control over the Guántanamo naval base. The Republic of Cuba will maintain sovereignty and independence.
- 2) Promotes dialogue between dissidents and reformists, both within the former government and the army.
- 3) Allow the transitional government use of all necessary power until it calls universal elections within two years.
- 4) Dissolve the old assembly and allow the new assembly to create a constitution – either based on Constitution of 1940 or not – that will be presented to a popular referendum.
- 5) Try people suspected of documented crimes against humanity and human rights violations. Propose a commission for judging past crimes.
- 10) Begin an information campaign that would explain steps needed to ensure reform.

In conclusion, this plan provides very moderate reforms and relies on gradual dialogue between the regime and the opposition. It promises to allow exiled Cubans back into political life and protects citizens against chaotic privatization and property restitutions.

PROMOTING THE DAY AFTER

The document *To Promote the Day After (Para propiciar el día despues)* is an extended version of the outcomes of the General Reunion of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. This assembly gathered one hundred and fifty small organizations in May 2005. It builds on work started by fifteen committees and incorporates the contributions of various experts. Their names do not appear on the document, but can be found in the list of committees on the Assembly webpage.

As the document's founder Martha Betriz says, the most important element is to "work on the change of the way how people think." The document is open to further debate which will help achieve agreement between groups in opposition and those in exile. When the moment of change arrives, Cubans "should not think [that] Three Kings have arrived with their gifts," as the document says, but instead must be prepared to prevent any chaos or disruption of security, healthcare, and welfare.

The transitional government should agree to take steps in order to:

- 1) Liberate political prisoners, consider amnesty, and abolish the death penalty.
- 2) Promotes dialogue between dissidents and reformists, both within the former government and the army.
- 3) Allow the transitional government use of all necessary power until it calls universal elections within two years.
- 4) Dissolve the old assembly and allow the new assembly to create a constitution – either based on Constitution of 1940 or not – that will be presented to a popular referendum.
- 5) Try people suspected of documented crimes against humanity and human rights violations. Propose a commission for judging past crimes.
- 6) Dismantle any military-like organizations and demilitarize society.
- 7) Propose compensation for expropriated Cubans because property restitution seems impossible.
- 8) Involve Cuba in international organizations and agreements, such as the IMF and the Cotonou Accords.
- 9) Free the economy as much as possible, maintaining low inflation and basic social security, including, for example, loans for new housing. Ask for aid from abroad.

This document is understandably tolerant to the army, since it will likely become the most important force in the months after Castro's death. It also leaves several questions open, including those relating to the constitution, restitution, Cuban exile and reconciliation with the past.

TEN YEARS ALL UNITED

The previous two documents became public almost ten years after the crucial *La Patria es de Todos* (Homeland Belongs to All) appeal in 1997. Since then, the opposition movement has gone through the process of uniting and dividing many times, and has shifted its goals from reforming the Communist Party to developing a democratic system.

Large blocs in the opposition movement – *Arco Progresista*, independent unions, and most importantly the coalition *Todos Unidos* (All United) – largely emphasize social security related aspects of reform; however, they do not openly contradict the programs presented above. *Arco Progresista* calls for "gradual changes" in its 2004 document entitled *Six Pacts*, and *Todos Unidos* calls for a freer society in its own document from 2004.

"We are not divided, that is only what Europeans want to believe," says Vladimiro Roca, leader of *Todos Unidos*. "We all talk to each other, but we don't need to issue more common documents, but focus on broadening actual work to all the society."

If regular Cubans are to shape their future by themselves, they must have more space for free debate and more experiences to draw on and to learn from.

Oswaldo Payá: "Cubans used to wait for others to decide for them. The main idea behind the project is that Cubans abandon their learned helplessness and learn to express and discuss their own wishes and fears."

AHEAD OF CENTRAL EUROPEANS: DRAFT OF *TODOS CUBANOS* AND THE TRAPS OF PAST TRANSITIONS

Fredo Arias King

The Working Document (*El Documento de Trabajo - DT*), published after a long nation-wide discussion, set the basis for a Program entitled "All Cubans." The Program prepares Cubans for the difficult transition process.

In 1989 and 1991 many democratic leaders in Communist regimes did not rely on a similar program when they suddenly had to form governments. In that sense, our friends from the Varela Project (*Proyecto Varela*) have taken the lead over other democratic activists at such a phase.

The authors of The Working Document have studied other transition processes and know very well what is necessary for the successful leadership of government in a Post-Communist system.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out few details which, according to my opinion, need to be considered and discussed in greater depth. It seems political aspects have been studied more than the economic ones. With this I refer to the parts of The Work-

ing Document that remained almost unchanged in the final document entitled All Cubans (*Todos Cubanos*).

STRONG POINTS OF THE WORKING DOCUMENT: HANDLING POWER

The CNGT (national council for the transition government) appears to have all the capacities that are necessary for governing the country and dismantling the obstacles inherited from the previous regime. The council takes seriously the recommendation of the democrats to concentrate all



Marta Betriz Roque with Edward McWilliam-Scott

political powers in their hands during the initial stage of transition, in order to later create Montesquieu's "checks and balances." Democrats in Eastern Europe often associated authority with dictatorship. They kept their hands tied prior to undertaking the hard work and later had to pay the price.

The Working Document considers the abolition of the current constitution and the summoning of a constituent assembly to discuss new fundamental laws. Several transition systems have used their existing constitutions (in curtailed form) but this made later political work more difficult.

The Working Document acknowledges mechanisms used in some Eastern European countries, the three most politically successful – the Czech Republic, Estonia and Eastern Germany), where an interim transition government was established to manage the difficult tasks and to give society time to get organized and prepared for free elections. Hungary and some countries did not have the advantage of an interim government and instead immediately introduced a political party system. Consequently, the country's reconstruction was slightly delayed.

Unlike others, this Working Document does not confuse punishment with measures of decommunization. When contemplating the dissolution of the Communist Party and its related organizations, the Document uses the right arguments and emphasizes, at several points, that ideology is not to be punished. The authors are aware that the Communist Party of Cuba is more a network of complicities (or a "control mechanism") than a party pursuing certain ideology.

It discusses an immediate dissolution of the major Communist entities (the Ministry of Interior, shock troops and the militia), while the CNGT will carry out changes of the lower level ranks (judges, municipal authorities and other public

officers) according to its own needs. It will assume the executive and legislative powers.

Unlike several transition leaders in other parts of the world, the authors of the Document are aware that repression could "be transferred in liquid form" to the foreign bank accounts of Communist officials and later again be transformed into political power. Therefore, they consider finding and confiscating "the liquid repression" of the Communist Party of Cuba and its related organizations, including also what is referred to as "mixed enterprises."

Many democratic leaders in Communist regimes did not rely on a similar program when they suddenly had to form governments. The authors of *Todos Cubanos* have taken a lead over other democratic activists at such a phase.

The authors of the Working Document are aware that true reconciliation can be achieved only if the regime's archives are opened to the public in order to make the relationships, abuses, etc., more transparent and possible to prove, and to ensure that amnesty will not bring impunity.

Countries that did not carry out such steps gave an artificial advantage to those who knew the content of the archives (the abusers) at the expense of those who did not (the victims). The Document therefore considers finding, confiscating, guarding and using the archives for the purposes of democratic powers.

It advocates a takeover of all means of communication by the CNGT board. During the transition period, the media should promote pluralist information but should also be under the firm control of liberal powers (of all ideological orientations). Later the media should be privatized, their owners being, ideally, both former dissidents and foreign investors, as in the case of the Adam Michnik's Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Vojislav Koštunica, the former president of Yugoslavia, refused to confiscate the means of communication from deposed president Slobodan Milošević's allies. Consequently, the democratic powers and the government of Zoran Djindjić (who was later assassinated) lost their popularity very rapidly, since the media represented an illiberal opposition irrevocably loyal to a different project.

The program contemplates renegotiating the exterior debt contracted by the Communist regime. The debt represents an important issue and foreign governments and banks are usually generous towards the transition countries (as in the case of Poland). Hungary decided not to renegotiate its debts, thus affecting the priorities of the liberalization and privatization process. Debts with Russia, Venezuela and Brazil should be unilaterally repudiated.

It emphasizes economic freedom with social approach. If interpreted correctly, the model will lead to a better performing economy. However, if interpreted differently (the well-known "Third Way"), it will result in a weak economy, "equal distribution of poverty" and exclusive opportunities for elite insiders.

PITFALLS: ECONOMIC REFORM

Every transition program of this type is replete with contradictions as it strives to please all of the groups that need to coalesce. These difficulties, of course, can be ignored once the breakthrough happens. However, keep in mind that the Working Document has some potentially serious pitfalls.

The Working Document contemplates various social guarantees and their related costs. The reason why this is included in the Document is perfectly understandable, but at the same time it is necessary to consider that such measures can raise expectations among the population and minimize the feeling of sacrifice that will have to be made at the beginning.

Helmut Kohl and Lothar de Mazière made a similar mistake, promising Western Germans that the union with the German Democratic Republic would not add any additional costs, and promising Eastern Germans that their standards of living would reach the level of the Federal Republic of Germany in five years. In Russia, Yeltsin assured his country that the economic slump would last one year.

Some think Kohl and de Mazière should have been honest and introduce a policy similar to Churchill's "Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat." The call for sacrifice is often met with a surprisingly good reaction from the population, enabling the reforms during the "Window of Opportunity." Although the call for sacrifice is not mentioned in the Document, it will have to be made immediately after the fall of the Communism.

The Working Document does not clearly state how long it will take before it is approved in a referendum once the Communist regime has collapsed. In such case, who will be holding power?

Most likely, an interim committee will be established even before the referendum; or the Communist parliament could feel obliged to elect one of the dissidents as new president of Cuba before the elections will take place (as in the case of Czechoslovakia and Václav Havel in December 1989).

In any case, the democrats should enter into any agreement with the Communist authorities that breaks their monopoly. However, once the Communist power

has collapsed, these agreements should not be kept. Unlike Lech Wałęsa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Havel was aware of that. He kept changing the rules when negotiating with the Communists until they lost their power; contrary to Havel, Wałęsa and Mazowiecki carried on their anachronistic "round table" commitments even after the Communist Party in Poland had collapsed.

The Document seems to guarantee the Communists positions in the government. If this proposal is somehow adopted, the Communists who will feel

The authors are aware that the Communist Party of Cuba is more a network of complicities (or a control mechanism) than a party pursuing certain ideology.

affected by the lustration and decommunization measures could use it as an argument before court, since on page 48 the document explicitly says that "the citizen members of the Communist Party of Cuba that hold administrative offices... or are in the Government, will be allowed to remain in their offices at their request, being submitted only to the administrative authority, and following the direction defined by the PCP (*el Plan Cuba Primero* – Cuba First plan)."

The Working Document considers introducing several measures of a state-controlled economy, which will not be necessary – and could even represent an obstacle in a well-managed market economy. I am afraid that such measures, as proposed, will encourage corruption and bureaucracy, create difficulties with property rights and unnecessarily prolong the painful transition period.

The part of the Document concerning the banking system does not consider what could be one of the most important reforms of the post-Communist transition period: removing the elements of the previous banking regime; preventing them from opening new banks; and adopting strict banking legislation that will allow only the most prestigious and transparent banks to enter the country's market.

It is well known, as the former prime minister of Estonia said, that in the post-Communist transition processes, all problems start in banks. Communists are interested in banks because, through them, they have the capital and information to capture first industry, and then politics. Because Laar Mart was aware of this fact, he did not let that happen in Estonia, which is the only country in the area that did not suffer a banking crisis (or a return of the Communists).

The Working Document presumes that a group of bureaucrats will have "the necessary up-to-date information concerning the needs of enterprises and the Cuban nation in general... Using these presuppositions the SCNCE (national subcommission on external trade) will impose regulations on external trade."

However, in a liberal First-World economy the government does not aim to directly "control" financial flows, external trade and its conditions. The above-mentioned approach represents the dirigiste and anti-liberal spirit of a Third-World country present in other parts of the Document as well.

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NOTES ON THE PROPOSAL OF THE CUBAN CONSTITUTION

Vojtěch Cepl

Every constitution is a part of the rule of law and all its provisions should be legally enforceable. Comparative constitutional studies classify the proposal of the future Cuban constitution as an Aspirational Constitution, since it includes a program for the future and the objectives that the country intends to pursue but

whose achievement is not altogether feasible. These notes are meant to pinpoint the most ambitious and teleological provisions, which may make the enforcement of the document more difficult.

The Program for All Cubans (*Todos Cubanos*) is the result of a three year

debate that dealt with the transformation of the country and the future democratic organization of Cuba. One of its parts is an extensive constitutional proposal, representing several different trends and disputes among the opposition. The following notes provide a brief summary of this document.



Photo by Pavel Hroch

THE CONSTITUTION AND ITS STRUCTURE

A modern constitution usually consists of two parts. The first part, considered a constitution in the narrow sense, comprises provisions concerning the establishment of the supreme bodies of the state, their powers and interrelationships and their dissolution. Generally, the “pillars of state” are divided into the legislative, the executive and the judicial branch. Moreover, some other supreme institutions are now being added, such as an ombudsman, a supreme audit office and a central bank. On the other hand, the second part, usually known as the Bill of Rights, provides for the relationship between the citizens and the state. The drawback of the proposal is not the unusual, inverse order of the two parts, but rather the imbalance between them. The constitution in the narrow sense is too sketchy and does not include provisions on judicial review, administrative justice, supreme audit office or on an independent bank board.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES:

Ad Article I: The provision according to which the state shall guarantee that all citizens capable of work will have an opportunity to find employment is too ambitious and not realistic.

Ad Article V: The fact that any attempt at preventing someone from access to the comforts of a social state is considered a crime is exaggerated. The present list of citizen rights is not clear and is comprised of both heterogeneous political rights, such as standing for election, and social rights, such as access to education and free health care. Rather than calling this article “Equality,” its provisions should be consistently divided into basic political rights and liberties, and social rights.

Ad Article VI: To the right for free movement within Cuba, two further rights should be added – the right to travel freely abroad and the right to emigrate.

Ad Article VIII: I believe the title itself – “Work And Property” – expresses a restrictive attitude towards private property. The recognition of the inalienable right to work according to personal skills and to an adequate remuneration for the work according to quantity and quality are not legally claimable.

Comparative constitutional studies classify the proposal of the future Cuban constitution as an Aspirational Constitution, since it includes a program for the future and the objectives that the country intends to pursue but whose achievement is not altogether feasible.

Ad Article X: The organization and function of state bodies does not clearly explain the basic principle of the division of powers, free competition between political parties, the principle of the government of laws, a legally consistent state and constitutionalism. Furthermore, this section usually provides for the national emblem, flag, anthem, capital city and other national symbols.

Apropos, if the National Popular Assembly is not a traditionally established name, I would dare suggest a simple name of National Assembly. In my opinion, the word “popular” seems to be a pleonasm and an euphemism.

Ad Article XIII: The provision on judicial power requires a separation of judicial and legislative powers, however, it does not stipulate the separation of judicial and executive powers, which is more important. Moreover, the constitutional proposal lacks provisions on judicial immunity and on the administrative and disciplinary responsibility of the judges. Neither did I find any provision on prosecution. The prosecution is mentioned only briefly and further details are left for a special law.

By way of conclusion, I would like to point out that this program lacks a clear policy regarding rehabilitation, property restitution, privatization, lustration and decommunisation, which is essential for the transition from totality to democracy. Although I admit that in the present phase, these issues should not be announced officially, I believe they should already be considered. The program deals with these problems only by establishing conciliatory commissions, however, these commissions will not have any “lustration” or judicial power. The commissions are only mentioned in the interim provisions, but they are not closely specified.

Vojtěch Cegl, Member of the Drafting Committee for the Czech Constitution (1992) and Justice of the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic (1993–2003), is a professor of law at Charles University in Prague and at several distinguished US universities.

CUBA AND THE KEYS OF THE SPANISH TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Carlos Alberto Montaner

Cuba Transition to Democracy Summit, October 2006

Fidel Castro will die shortly and a remarkable opportunity will arise to alter the history of Cuba. It is timely, then, to look at similar experiences and try to learn from them. Let us turn to the transition in Spain and utilize the efficient educational technique of questions and answers.

WHAT HAPPENED IN SPAIN?

In November 1975, Gen. Francisco Franco died in Madrid after governing Spain with an iron hand for 36 years. He was the military chief and political caudillo who won the Civil War (1936–1939). After his triumph, he established a long, authoritarian, single-party dictatorship that was closer to national-Catholicism than to Falangism. His regime began looking very much like totalitarian fascism but ended with certain minimal (and closely watched) spaces of political freedom and a great deal of economic freedom.

Surprisingly, after the dictator's death a process of change began – against all expectations and at a speed no one could have imagined – that culminated in 1978 with the promulgation of a new Constitution that brought Spain in line with all the European democracies. Francoism, it was said at the time, had committed *hara-kiri*. Overturning the laws and the Constitutional restraints installed by Francoism, Parliament approved changes that transformed the political face of Spain,

instituting pluralism, civil liberties and majority government. Three years later, in 1981, the Socialists – the big losers in the Civil War – gained control of the government. That process, which was not exempt from dangers, tensions and a certain amount of violence, was called the transition and had Adolfo Suárez as its

In the same manner as the Franquistas discovered that there was life beyond Francoism, the Cuban Communists will inevitably reach the same conclusion: there is life beyond Communism.

principal architect. Suárez had come from Francoism and, although he was not widely known, was considered by some to be a dictatorship “hawk.” He wasn't.

HOW DID IT ALL HAPPEN?

Although everyone justly attributes to Suárez the leading role in the transition, the truth is that almost all the political factors behaved with prudence and moved in the right direction.

King Juan Carlos, who since childhood had been carefully taught to carry on Franco's authoritarian tradition, began to move in the direction of democracy shortly after donning the crown. He wanted his monarchy to be like England's or the Netherlands', subject to the control of Parliament. To Juan Carlos, it was obvious that his legitimacy as a ruler should not come from Franco's will but from the people's will.

At the urging of Suárez, most of the Franquistas moved to the right of center of the political spectrum, forging a coalition with certain Christian Democrats and Liberals, renouncing authoritarianism and the Fascist view of a single party. Suárez even managed to lead the Liberal Internationale, to which he added the adjective “progressive.”

The Catholic Church, which had been an accomplice of Francoism during the first 20 years of the dictatorship, also moved away from religious fundamentalism and allowed Spain to adopt a lay and free profile. The spirit of the Vatican II council had penetrated deeply into the vision of the Church.

The Communist Party accepted the existence of a parliamentary monarchy as a form of government, renounced Leninism as a method of struggle and abandoned its efforts to achieve power by fostering social disorder, workers' strikes and acts of

violence. Instead, it abided by the peaceful rules of parliamentary democracy.

The Socialist Party also acknowledged the existence of a parliamentary democracy. If the Socialists in Sweden and the Laborites in Britain could govern under the ritual shade of the monarchy, why couldn't the Spaniards? In addition, at a congress held in 1979, the Socialists explicitly renounced the Marxist vision of the economy and society.

The labor unions – though deeply penetrated by the Communists – and the business owners – many of whom were accustomed to the protection furnished by Francoism – were able to negotiate their differences peaceably and establish a *modus vivendi* based on cooperation and a gradual increase in their contributions to the social services. Those accords, sponsored by the government, were called The Moncloa Pacts – because they were negotiated at Moncloa Palace – and they guaranteed the social and economic stability the country needed to transition towards an open political model.

The European democracies in the 1970s, led by France and Germany in the midst of the Cold War, had a special interest in seeing that the dictatorships remaining in Europe (Greece, Portugal and Spain) became Allied democracies that would strengthen the southern Mediterranean region and cooperate in the construction of a common economic space. For that reason, they pressured Madrid, helped the emerging democratic political parties and conditioned Spain's entry into the European Economic Community and NATO to a total opening of the country's economy and political system.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

This exemplary political process managed to succeed basically for three reasons:

All the actors had something very solid to gain, as Game Theory would later explain. They all needed each other and therefore all were willing to cede something to gain something in return. The only net losers were the orthodox Francoists, convinced of the virtues of tyr-

anny; but they were very few and by that time had almost no emotional connection with the people.

The change also had an obvious director: then-called European Economic Community. Spain did not have to remain isolated from the rest of the booming Europe that emerged from World War II. The old dictum by Ortega y Gasset remained applicable: "Spain is the problem; Europe is the solution." The change was not a leap into the void. Everybody knew what the objective was.

The youngest sectors of the Francoite ruling class did not see themselves in the mythology of the Civil War and they secretly abhorred the tired and anachronistic discourse created in the 1930s during the head-on clashes between Communists and Fascists. The young Franquistas did not see themselves as the victorious heroes of a heroic feat (as the old-timers did) but as the hapless defenders of a regime that was more-or-less repudiated by a majority of the people.



Carlos Alberto Montaner in Prague

WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUBA AND SPAIN?

Until 1898, Cuba was a political and historical portion of Spain. Those links had lasted for 400 years but were not severed when the Republic came into being – they were strengthened. Cuba continued to be an essentially Spanish society throughout the 20th Century, especially in the first several decades, just like the United States, at least for a while, continued to be spiritually and culturally a British territory even after the former's independence in the late 18th Century.

Between 1902, when the island had barely one and a half million inhabitants, and 1926, when the first laws against immigration were enacted, almost one million Spaniards migrated to Cuba and the human links between the two countries tightened. Cuba continued to be a very Spanish nation. This explains, for example, why during the colonial war in Morocco, fought by Spain to put down a rebellion in the 1920s, about 1,000 Cuban volunteers fought in the International Brigades, a huge number – proportionally speaking – given the small population of the island. At the same time, the ups and downs of the Spanish war were part and parcel of the impassioned political debate in Cuba.

There were also some secret links: the political gangsterism that flourished in Cuba in the 1930s and '40s was reminiscent of the *pistolero* carried out by the anarchist labor unions in Catalonia in the 1920s. The Cuban revolutionary vision of the 1930s resembled (or was inspired by) the radicalism of numerous Spaniards. Moreover, the Cuban Constitution of 1940 owes much to the Spanish Constitution of 1931.

Are there major differences between Spain during the transition and today's Cuba?

Of course; the historic and political ties between the two countries cannot hide the big differences between them.

Compared with the misery wrought by Castroism, Spain in 1975, when Franco died, was a middle-class society that had attained 75 percent of the per-capita earnings of the EEC. Millions of Spaniards had savings in the bank and 80 percent lived in their own homes. At that time, the level of unemployment was very low and so was the cost of living (though wages were low, too).

There were other fundamental differences. In Spain, property rights existed and were respected. And, with the exception of politics, where special, harsh and arbitrary legislation applied, the courts dispensed justice in accordance with the law. Spain had an orderly and clean society that had reached the highest level of development in the nation's history. Although other countries, like France, Italy and Germany, had grown a lot more than Spain after WWII, Spain's progress was nothing to sneer at.

Without a doubt, when it came to the economy, income distribution, social protection and quality of life, Francoism had been successful. It is possible, then, that that relative well-being, accompanied by the strong hand of Francoism, made the Spaniards more conservative and prudent; they had real achievements to preserve. And that's quite different from the panorama of failure we see in Cuba.

CAN THE SPANISH TRANSITION SERVE AS A GUIDELINE FOR THE CUBANS?

Of course. Several lessons can be learned from the Spanish experience:

It is not true that societies are by nature reluctant to engage in democratic behavior, as Franco believed and Castro believes. Perhaps the horror of a long dictatorial period makes the people more reflective and distrustful, which makes them more reluctant to follow the *caudillos*.

The death of the dictator is to all – the government and the opposition – a mag-

nificent opportunity to bury the regime and, with it, the historical period that has been totally overtaken. With the death of this type of dictator all the loyalties founded on personal relations, not on ideological links disappear.

The key to the transition lies in creating the conditions so that everyone, or almost everyone, sees the change as an opportunity to improve living conditions for oneself and one's relatives. In the same manner as the *Franquistas* discovered that there was life beyond Francoism, the Cuban Communists will inevitably reach the same conclusion: there is life beyond Communism. And that, of course, is easy to verify by reading the history of what once was Communist Europe.

It is smart to propitiate a sort of collective historic amnesia that leads to the reconciliation of societies. A former minister in Franco's government whose father was executed by the Reds during the Civil War phrased it this way: "I cannot fix and save the past. I can only save the future." That attitude is compatible with the total freedom of expression and publication that will enable everyone to tell their experiences and air their grievances without resorting to the official "truth commissions" that only manages to needlessly complicate the transition processes.

HOW CAN WE CONTRIBUTE TO A PEACEFUL TRANSITION IN CUBA?

There are several measures that can help Cubans. The most important may be these:

The United States and the European Union must make it very clear (and repeat in private or in public every time it's useful or necessary) that the only legitimate and acceptable goal is the establishment in Cuba of a plural democracy where human rights are respected. In other words, there will be no give-and-take with political dictatorships that limit an opening to the economic field.

The U.S. and the E.U. must continue to give all kinds of support, symbolic and practical, to the democrats in the opposition, both inside and outside Cuba. That support must be combined with public denunciation of the abuses Cubans suffer at the hands of the dictatorship.

Initiatives such as the ones put forth by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, a key figure in the process of pacification of Central America, must be encouraged.

It is advisable to maintain the economic pressures on the dictatorship, as the United States and Europe do, with the understanding that they will be eliminated as soon as a genuine process of change begins in Cuba.

It is vital to expand the conduits of information to the Cuban people via Radio and TV Martí, the Internet and any channel of information that manages to break the dictatorship's news blockade.

The plans for future aid to a democratic Cuba must be given maximum publicity, so Cubans may see clearly that change will bring them a reasonable climate of material prosperity and security.

It would be good to leave the door open so Cuba may join the Free Trade Area of the Americas if that's what the Cubans decide to do in a democratic future. It would also be very useful for Cubans to learn the enormous advantages that that accord has brought to Mexico so they might imagine what it could bring to Cuba. It would be the equivalent of the stimulus felt by the Spaniards when they learned that the establishment of a democratic regime would take them into the European Union.

Carlos Alberto Montaner is a journalist and writer who has published more than twenty books on Cuba and democracy in Latin America. He founded the Cuban Liberal Union and is Vice President of Liberal International.

READY FOR THE CHANGE: APSC PROGRAM

The goal of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba (APSC) is to prepare the emerging civil society for change. In order to achieve this goal the executive committee of the APSC has written several important documents. Last August the APSC published a text entitled "Para propiciar el día después" (To Make Tomorrow Better).

This twenty seven page document presents ideas which will help Cubans consider regime change. The executive committee aims to offer guidelines for action that will also serve to outline a plan for transition. The representatives of the APSC understand that they must be prepared when the long-awaited transition process finally begins.

By promoting this document, the APSC is encouraging consensus on the themes discussed within the document. These themes emerged from discussion within the fifteen commissions of the General Meeting of the APSC in May 2005.

With this document, the executive committee of the APSC aims to provide much needed analysis of the current situation in order to prepare Cuban society for the start of the

transition process. The APSC has made it clear that this document contains a message about what such changes may bring.

The Assembly's main task is to make the population aware of what scenarios are possible and what to expect from them. In order to do so, the representatives of the APSC have promoted the idea of discussing the document amongst general members of the Assembly. The text could then be discussed during the first Congress of Independent Libraries and Social and Cultural Information Centres (Congreso de Bibliotecas independientes y de Centros de Información sociocultural; 10.10.2007 – 24.2.2008).

The Cuban government spreads false information about the country's present condition. To combat this, it is essential to increase awareness of the current Cuban situation. Cubans must become aware of the ideas and concepts that surround the scenario in which they live in order to understand the inevitability of change.

Lucas Garve is a Cuban independent journalist and a member of Freedom of Expression Foundation



Photo by Pavel Hroch

OPINION

COMMENTS ABOUT NGO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY ON CUBA

Markus Meckel

Last month in Brussels, a group of fifteen European NGOs and various MEPs presented to the press a set of recommendations for the EU policy on Cuba. They consisted of supporting dissidents, encouraging an independent civil society, providing for the free flow of information and targeting the Cuban regime with punitive measures in cases of human rights violations.

In general, I agree with these recommendations and I especially share those that are geared towards the promotion of civil society development and support for dissidents in Cuba. The European Union has to take a clear stance with regards to supporting democratic forces at home and abroad.

The West learned from the past that its hopes of a “change through rapprochement” in its dealings with the former Eastern bloc regimes had a flaw. The change was conceived solely as a change “from the top down.” This concept did not accommodate new political actors emerging from within society. Indeed, they were often viewed skeptically as a factor of instability and left alone.

As a consequence, the way to deal with the regime should be re-evaluated. The EU shall not restrict itself to punitive sanctions only. It has to be proactive in order to be able to influence future development on the island.

Even though the government does not seem to be very receptive, we have to keep making proposals for constructive co-operation.

Despite frustrating experiences and harassment by the Cuban authorities, diplomatic missions should try to spread information and to provide uncensored access to the Internet.

In particular, we should not shy away from official contacts and practical co-operation that aims to disseminate information to the Cuban public that increases the people’s exposure to outside world. Academic and cultural exchange programmes are a case in point. These enable experts to travel abroad and allow foreign experts to do research or even teach at Cuban schools for a while. We are in dire need of more such exchanges.

Furthermore, some countries have tried to open cultural centres in

Havana and some have even succeeded. These provide a good means for Cuban citizens to stay in touch with intellectual currents in the global arena. In a country that has suffered isolation and economic depression for decades, these centres provide an important breathing space. These institutions do not have a political mission but they can help people develop their own view of the world and learn how to think independently. Cuba needs intelligent and well versed people to guide it to the future.

Any measure that increases Cubans’ contacts with the world around them should be welcome. If the authorities turn us down again and again, we shall let the Cuban public know that a helping hand from Europe has been brushed aside. Despite frustrating experiences and harassment by the Cuban authorities, diplomatic missions should try to spread information and to provide access uncensored to the Internet.

Markus Meckel, German Bundestag MP for SPD, was a founding member of the oppositional Social Democrats in communist Germany and participated in “round-table” talks. He served as the first democratic elected Foreign Minister of the GDR after the first free election in Eastern Germany. Meckel, who is a member of ICDC, travelled to Cuba to meet dissidents and government officials. On a second trip he was denied a visa by Cuban authorities.

OPINION

THE FUTURE OF CUBA IN THE HANDS OF THE GENERALS

José Antonio Fornaris

When Carlos Aldana was considered the third most powerful man in Cuba, a colleague told me that he had attended a meeting of the Provincial Committee of the Cuban Communist Party in Havana, chaired by Fidel Castro, where different international issues had been discussed. At this meeting, the leader, referring to capitalism, had stated that China had opened its door, Vietnam had opened its window, but Cuba would not even roll up its blinds.

To a large extent, this has been the absolute guideline. However, everybody now knows Castro is seriously ill. It is unlikely that he will be able to take charge of all the power he has been holding for almost fifty years.

What will happen when the *caudillo* disappears for good? With Castro or without, the regime of orthodox communism, which is very close to absolutism, does not have much to do with modern world.

Nevertheless, Castro's heir, the Army General and the President of the Council of State and Minister Raúl Castro, is totally committed to the regime. He has always been the second in charge, and it seems that he will try to follow the ways of the Maximum Leader as far as the circumstances will allow him to do so.

Raúl Castro is an old man, aged 75. He has never been as charismatic and



Photo by Pavel Hroch

Cuba

as shrewd of a politician as his brother. A strong leader for the most part of his almost five decades in power, Fidel has achieved absolute control of the country, which in the past was a progressive republic with all of the typical institutions. Raúl is not like Fidel and, whether he likes it or not, he has to hurry and take measures which would benefit the general public. Otherwise he could be overruled by the course of events.

When Fidel casts no more shadow on the government, we may very well see some progress, including amnesty for political prisoners, adjustments in foreign policy and decisions which would improve the life of Cuban people at least in some way. Yet to be able to carry out such changes and to slightly refresh the regime, Raúl will have to "roll up the blinds."

Although this prospect is only hypothetical, it is quite possible. Raúl Castro has made his limited administrative term seem as if he did not always play the leading role and he assured the public that the only heir to Fidel is the Communist Party. However, the people who make the decisions that may be momentous for the future of the country are actually the army generals. All of them have been guerrillas in the past, and others hold offices in the political and civil hierarchy, but take on the uniform with their badges when they face any difficulty which may seem a little serious.

Carlos Aldana was the ideologist of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. He seemed to be a man of some power within the nomenclatura, but he did not belong to the old guard. He was defenestrated without any major difficulty.

However in 1989, when the general Arnaldo Ochoa, a seemingly unimpor-

tant man, was tried and sentenced to death, everything was quite different. Although he had been demoted before the trial, it was thought that a person of his position could not be sentenced and shot without the generals' approval.

We are not wrong to say that these men have a great portion of power. In the terms of a monarchy, they are the lords that the king must listen to.

The people who make the decisions that may be momentous for the future of the country are actually the army generals. All of them have been guerrillas in the past, and others who hold offices in the political and civil hierarchy, will take on the uniform with their badges to face any difficulty which may seem a little serious.

Until now, they have been answerable to the man who had helped them rise from obscurity and poverty, but now little is left of this man.

Nowadays, the generals are probably in control of everything that is important for the economy. It is no secret that the Armed Forces have influence on the essential sectors of Cuban economy. Yet, considering the fact that people tend to take care of their own

interests, this may actually be positive rather than negative.

In terms of democracy, one might think that the public could demand all their rights that have been infringed, but everybody knows that a left-wing dictatorship is the worst of all, since it takes control of all property and invalidates the rule of law. We must remember that practically all diversions towards democracy in communist countries were taken by those in power, or at least with their approval.

In this sense, Cuba, like Romania, would be an exception. But as in Romania, the change would have to be supported by the army. Cuban generals are somewhat special because they used to be young and humble partisans and now have become people of national importance. However, all generals, after all, are only human, and in this case, all of them are already old.

The assumption is that most of Cuba's generals, if not all of them, want to bequeath the possibility of living in a peaceful country, with good prospects of development, that is set in the modern world and that has the sufficient potential for fulfilling the hopes of its people, to their grandsons

Either against the will of the generals, or with their consent, democratic countries should openly and enduringly demand respect for Western values, including free, just and multi-party elections. There is nothing that may seem unchangeable when those who know perfectly well that without liberty, a human being is utterly incomplete, claim liberty themselves.

José Antonio Fornaris is an independent journalist living in Cuba. He is a cofounder of Cuba-Verdad press agency and publishes regularly at cubanet.org

CHARTER 77 AFTER THIRTY YEARS

Miroslav Kusý

In January 1977 first Czechoslovak citizens signed a document called Charter 77 that united the political opposition and called upon the representatives of the Communist regime to respect the human rights covenant. Now, thirty years after, I would like to mention the feelings and doubts I had when signing Charter 77. I believe it may bring hope to Cubans and many others, that signing such document is not a vain effort.

Originally I believed Charter 77 was a great move of the political strategy employed by the dissent against the normalization regime of president Husák in the then Czechoslovakia. On

one hand, the regime could not refuse to comply either with the Helsinki Final Act from 1975, referred to by the Charter, or with both International Covenants on Human Rights signed by the regime and effective since 1976. On the other hand, however, its representatives knew that complying with these international documents would lead to a political suicide. The regime could not admit that it considered the Charter to be a worthless scrap of paper, therefore it could not accept the critique in the introductory Declaration of Charter 77 that convicted it of such attitude. Consequently the regime launched a violent campaign about mendacious accu-

sations paid for by the West. Since it could not refuse constructive dialogue with its citizens (an actual leitmotif of the Declaration); it described the signatories as castaways and renegades and claimed that any discussion with them is principally out of the question.

All this was the content of the Charter; however, its true value was even higher, which is what I slowly came to realize. Above all, the signatories were not an anonymous mass or group of secret conspirators. They publicly declared themselves signatories of the Charter and made their name and address available to the party and the government,



photo by Pavel Hroch

Dama de Bianco

and therefore the secret police (StB) as well. Every signatory was aware of that and had to bear the consequences of his or her signature. It was a civil initiative with all that it bears, the initiative of individual, unique citizens who knew that the day after signing the Charter the secret police would come and see them.

In that sense, signing the Charter was a deed of civil courage. It was not the blind and spontaneous courage of a person who does not consider the consequences of his or her deeds, but a deliberate courage of a person who is aware of the impact and says: this is something I stand for wholeheartedly. The signatories of the Charter knew what was yet to come and the regime offered them a chance to take their signature back and bring themselves back. Although the pressure of the regime was enormous, only few gave in.

It was also an act of assuming the civil co-responsibility for the current state of public affairs in the country. Criticizing the regime and its dictatorship in itself won't do. According to the Charter each person bears responsibility for the general state of things, that is to say, he or she is also responsible for following the enacted agreements that, after all, bind not only the governments, but the citizens as well. The signatories of the Charter accepted the co-responsibility.

In such context, reproaches to the signatories uttered by some of the hidden dissidents were rather false and hypocritical: Why do you have to be such exhibitionists! Why do you scream aloud something we all secretly believe anyway! It is a useless irritation of the Communists that won't lead anywhere! You should learn a lesson from us, persons that are rewarded by the regime for a fictitious and formal collaboration. That is the way to make the regime more and more weak. After some time, I was shocked to hear these words from the

new cynical and pragmatic generation of the StB inspectors.

Because of all this, it was difficult to remain a member of Charter 77. One couldn't just sign and then leave. The Communists wouldn't let the signer do that. They tried to force the signatories who felt weakened or less convinced to ostentatiously take their signatures back. Thus every signer had to decide on what to do with his or her life. However, not even the Charter itself would simply let the member do that. The Charter was a civil initiative and signing the documents was only a beginning, a decision

Thirty years after, I would like to mention the feelings and doubts I had when signing Charter 77. I believe it may bring hope to Cubans and many others, that signing such document is not a vain effort.

of the signatory to live as a full-fledged citizen, and that is not easy at all.

The basic task of the initiative was pure and simple: give things and events their right names and not accept the regime's hypocrisy, its slogans, pseudo-brands and rhetoric. According to an essay by Václav Havel, life in truth was the true Power of the Powerless (the essay's title). It was a program, often ridiculed by Havel's opponents as pure utopia, inconvenient political pretence that should not be part of the real politics. But the Charter wasn't meant to be a political guideline for professional politicians, since they exist within a different level of social relations. Havel's life in truth was a program for

non-political politicians of such social initiatives as Charter 77. Its aim was not to enter the real politics, but to change it, to uncover it, show it in a true light and thus change its morals.

You might say it isn't much, not even worth mentioning, but Havel gave the Charter a program thanks to which it managed the same as the child in Andersen's famous fairy-tale, who was the first to say: the king is naked! Everybody knew it, but somebody had to come and say it aloud to break the magic of the ideological haze (Šimečka).

Yes, the Charter only said aloud what everybody saw and knew but what they didn't have the courage to follow as knowledge and act according to it. When the people heard these words uttered on the squares, they started laughing at the naked king, they stopped being afraid of him. They took the keys in their hands and rang them to celebrate their victory over the fear and oppression.

I know I simplified the whole story a bit, but I do stand by its basic outline, since that is what convinced me that Charter 77 was not only a great move of the political strategy to fight against the Communist tyranny. It became a life attitude of the signatories, because it is impossible to live in truth only when it suits us.

In that sense the message of the Charter is still relevant in every country. And I am sure that sooner or later "the signatories" will appear everywhere and follow that message.

30th December, 2006

Miroslav Kusý is a university professor in Slovakia. He was one of the founders of the Charter 77 movement and was imprisoned for political reasons.

policy paper in September 2006, focusing on current discussions about the EU's mid-term strategy towards Cuba, which shall be adopted during the next EU common policy revision.

The Right to Have a Say. Warsaw appeals to the EU and the governments of EU member states

Within the framework of the Warsaw conference "From Solidarity to Democracy: Can Cuba Achieve Freedom?" hosted by Lech Walesa Institute, a coalition of European NGOs launched an appeal to assist the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy. The document, *The Right to Have a Say*, has been sent to the 25 Heads of State of the European Union, the European Ambassadors in Cuba, as well as to the heads of the European institutions. To read it, please follow this link: www.icdcprague.org

ACTIVITIES OF THE NETWORK MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

People in Need (www.peopleinneed.cz/freedominnewyear) has launched a Christmas and New Year's Greeting campaign to support those who are unjustly imprisoned in Cuba, Belorussia and Burma. During the campaign, the Czech public was given the names of several political prisoners in these countries and the addresses to their prisons. Over 2500 postcards were sent during this campaign.

The Cuban program of the Slovak **Pontis Foundation** (www.pontisfoundation.sk) seeks to raise public awareness regarding Cuba both in Slovakia and other central European countries. In the autumn of 2006, Pontis organized a series of discussions with university and high school students on the topic of human rights in Cuba. Together with local partners, a public event focusing on Cuba was organized in Plovdiv, Bulgaria (see article). In December, the Pontis Foundation launched a solidarity campaign to give moral support to the *Damas en blanco* by appealing to people

to send a Christmas or New Year postcard to the Ladies in White.

On September 18, another Slovakian NGO, the **People in Peril Association**, and the Pontis Foundation organized a meeting with supporters and donors to raise funds for families of Cuban political prisoners. Held under the auspices of Jan Figel of the European Commission, the event was also the occasion to present *Prisoners of the Island of Freedom*, a publication depicting the stories of 15 supported families.

Last year, the third anniversary of the Cuban Black Spring was one of the first major events coordinated by the European NGOs. They met in April 2006 and created an informal NGO network

The People in Peril Association began publishing a brief newsletter on Cuba and development in Cuba. The bi-monthly Slovak language newsletter is sent to approximately 2500 people on the mailing list. Furthermore, the People in Peril Association continues to work with Slovak young people through film screenings and discussions about Cuba at high schools all over Slovakia. These meetings with young people will continue through January 2007.

The **International Society for Human Rights** (ISHR) (www.ishr.org), based in Frankfurt, Germany, has been working for human rights in Cuba since 1977. Its main project in winter 2006 was filing a 1503-Complaint against Cuba to the UN-Human Rights Council. Via

press information leaflets and the quarterly magazine "Cuba Report," the ISHR informs the public, especially media and politicians, about human rights in Cuba. Press conferences and a symposium on Cuba were organized in November and December. The organization has also developed a regularly updated database of information on political prisoners and their families in Cuba.

Over the past few months, the **Swedish Christian Democratic International Center** (www.kicsweden.org) has sent two delegations of politicians to meet with Cuban dissidents in Havana. The center has also published the first two issues of *La Primavera de Cuba*, a bi-monthly newspaper about Cuba, for Cubans. In December, KIC and the **Swedish International Liberal Centre** (www.silc.se) met the Swedish Parliament to present information on the situation for political prisoners in Cuba and seek financial support for the Fund for Cuba's Political Prisoners, a fund co-run by KIC and SILC which supports 15 of the political prisoners from the spring of 2003. KIC has also published a book, *690 Vivencias de terribles pesadillas*, written from jail by the political prisoner Antonio Díaz Sánchez, in which he tells his story.

In the last few months the Spanish **Asociación Española Cuba en Transición** (AECT) has tried to improve ties between people in Cuba who are fighting for freedom and Spanish people who can support their activities. AECT publishes articles and interviews of many dissidents in Spanish newspapers and the Internet. They have also selected Spanish articles on Cuba that could be of interest to Cubans and have published them in a book about Cuba. The week before Christmas, AECT, Raúl Rivero, former Cuban political prisoner and his wife Blanca Reyes, one of the *Damas de Blanco*, organized a benefit concert to collect books to be distributed to civil society groups on the island and to promote a website for Spanish tourists to Cuba (www.viajaacuba.com).

NEW REPORT

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA AT THE TWILIGHT OF THE CASTRO ERA

María Luisa Bascur

The general human rights situation in Cuba continues to deteriorate precipitously. The Castro government continues to repress all political and civil dissidence using criminal prosecutions, close surveillance of its citizens, harassment by mobs, police warnings and travel restrictions. The end result is that Cubans are systematically denied the basic rights of free expression, association, assembly, movement and due process of law.

This repression is not limited to the civil and political rights of the Cuban people. The regime has reduced the vast majority of the island's population to poverty, with average salaries totalling less than USD 20 per month. Clearly, this widespread poverty is not solely the result of bad economic policies or of the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union; it is the deliberate action of a totalitarian government seeking (like many others throughout history) to silence the masses through economic hardship.

The enjoyment of social, economic and cultural rights – traditionally the bastion of Cuba's pride – has also been substantially restricted by the government. Food continues to be rationed, housing inadequate and scarce, educa-

tion standards are falling and teaching materials lacking, while adequate and egalitarian healthcare is but a faint memory, with the best facilities reserved exclusively for currency-paying health tourists.

The regime keeps a very tight grip on its people, through economic hardship or through the well-oiled and sophisticated machinery of repression. The two main pillars of this machinery (which will be examined in this article) are:

- a) the use of law to repress any type of independent thought or action; and
- b) the deliberate information blackout imposed on the Cuban people.

RULE BY LAW RATHER THAN RULE OF LAW

In Cuba the law is used as a tool of repression, with criminal legislation providing the legal basis to silence and detain those who carry out any dissenting acts. Current legislation penalizes a person's propensity to commit a crime, or state of "dangerousness" (*estado de peligrosidad*), allows for "official warnings" to be given (which can also lead to detention) and severe-

ly restricts freedom of expression for reasons of "national security."

Besides the above-mentioned "crimes," in Cuba one can be imprisoned for misdemeanours ranging from trying to buy or sell anything on the black market to owning a satellite dish without official permission. Given the harsh economic conditions faced by most citizens in today's Cuba, very few can make ends meet without trading in favours and/or small-scale theft. Thus many have found themselves in prison for simply trying to provide for their families.

This criminalization of so many aspects of ordinary life, and of any type of dissenting acts, has led to a massive growth in the prison population on the island. Unofficial statistics estimate that the current prison population ranges from 80,000 to 100,000 inmates, incarcerated in more than 300 prisons. Most of the convicts are in prison for non-violent crimes, with at least 300 political prisoners. Such figures imply that 0.9 % of the island's population is behind bars, giving Cuba one of the highest per capita imprisonment rates in the world (the United States is at 0.7 %). It is therefore no surprise that some call Cuba a "floating prison."

This situation is compounded by the Cuban people's general lack of knowledge about their rights. An alarming example is the deliberate lack of dissemination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the Cuban authorities. Not only is the Declaration not publicly distributed, but possessing a copy of the Declaration has been considered evidence of treason.

A CURTAIN OF SILENCE

This information blackout not only relates to human rights legislation and standards (national and international), but to general information as well. Freedom of expression does not exist in Cuba; only expressions which coincide with official political ideology are allowed. Legislation prohibiting freedom of expression through political offences lists crimes such as enemy propaganda, disrespect to the Commander-in-Chief, offence to the homeland, ideological deviation, dangerousness and distribution of false information.

The most important instrument for freedom of expression – the press – is non-existent in Cuba. As independent media remains banned, there are virtually no independent publications aside from several Catholic church newsletters. A small number of journalists manage to write articles for foreign websites or publish underground newsletters, but they do so at considerable personal risk. Unsurprisingly, access to the Internet is severely restricted in Cuba and those who do so without the required authorizations can also incur criminal charges, such as “counter-revolutionary Internet usage.”

Those who question the regime – either individually or through an organization – are increasingly facing repression and psychological

terror. In the authorities' efforts to clamp down on any independent thought, the regime has developed a full-fledged system to instill fear amongst civil society activists and their families. The most commonly used method against those who try to exercise their freedom of expression is the “act of repudiation,” an act of public denunciation and harassment by state-organized mobs. Alternative methods are physical acts of aggression, short-term detentions, dismissal from jobs, searching of res-

The regime keeps a very tight grip on its people, be it through economic hardship or through a well-oiled and sophisticated machinery of repression.

idences, threats to family members, police warnings of imminent arrest, travel prohibitions and defamation campaigns.

Regardless of these risks and restrictions civil society groups continue to be established and are growing in membership.

CONCLUSION

Cubans, especially now with an ailing Fidel Castro, are waiting to see how developments will unfold. While no one can know how things will play out, the Cuban people's determination to decide their own fate – without foreign intervention – and choose the type of government, seems unshakable. One can only hope that when change does come, it will be in the

shape of a pluralistic society, free of repression, in which Cubans will be able to finally enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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¹ This article is an extract of a report Human Rights in Cuba at the Twilight of the Castro Era prepared in December 2006 by *Cuba Futuro*, a Dutch foundation which promotes human rights and supports civil society groups in Cuba. It is based on, inter alia, a mission undertaken by *Cuba Futuro*, along with members of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) to Cuba in June-July 2006. The full report is available at www.cuba-futuro.org

² The ‘state of dangerousness’ is established by articles 72–90 of the Criminal Code, under which an individual can be sentenced for up to four years’ imprisonment on the grounds that the authorities believe the individual has a ‘special proclivity’ to commit crimes, even though they might not have actually committed a crime. These articles broadly define ‘dangerous’ people as those who act in a manner that contradicts ‘socialist morality’ or engage in ‘anti-social behaviour.’

³ Article 75 of the Criminal Code provides for an ‘official warning’ to people the authorities deem to be at risk of becoming ‘dangerous’, i.e., those who are not yet ‘dangerous’ but who are regarded as having potential criminal tendencies because of their ‘ties or relations with people who are potentially dangerous to society, other people, and to the social, economic and political order of the socialist State’.

⁴ See figures published in *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional, Lista parcial de sancionados o procesados por motivos políticos o político-sociales* (Havana: 5 July 2006)

⁵ See figures published in *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional, Lista parcial de sancionados o procesados por motivos políticos o político-sociales* (Havana: 5 July 2006)

⁶ <http://www.netforcuba.org/HumanRights-EN/HumanRights/HR-Expression.htm>

⁷ See www.vitral.org

⁸ Currently there are 25 journalists in prison who have paid with their freedom for having founded an independent news agency, written for a dissident review or spoken to the media in the Cuban diaspora. <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y06/nov06/07o4.htm>

⁹ Reporters without Borders, http://www.rsf.org/article.php?id_article=10611

¹⁰ Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (cited above)

EVENT

CUBA LIBRE DAYS IN BULGARIA

Martin Pasiak

Cuba Libre Days, an event which helped further highlight Cuban solidarity, was held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria on November 3 and 4, 2006. The successful event was organized by Diana Ivanova, a Bulgarian journalist active on Cuban human rights issues and Janet 45, a publishing house from Plovdiv. Cuba Libre Days in Plovdiv followed a similar event held in Sofia in January of 2006. Both events were organized with the support of the Pontis Foundation of Slovakia.

The goal of Cuba Libre Days was to raise public awareness about Cuba in Plovdiv. Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria, a post-communist country that in January 2007 became a member state of the European Union. The event took place in two parts: the evening of November 3 and the morning of November 4.

On the first day, an exhibition of photographs taken in Cuba by Diana Ivanova opened. Photographs were sold, and funds raised will be sent to two families of Cuban political prisoners and will also be used to support the future activities of cubalibre.bg, a new Bulgarian NGO. The movie *Made in Cuba: Children of Paradise* was screened. The film describes the dual morality of Cubans and the regime's fight with parents for the young, uncorrupted minds of children. The one hundred and thirty people who gathered in the audience were deeply affected by the facts revealed.

A subsequent discussion with Omar Lopez Montenegro, Director of Cuban American National Foundation, focused on various aspects of the current situation in Cuba, including a discussion of education and health systems, the perception of *la Revolución* and the possibility for political change on the island. The evening concluded with a sampling of congri and Cuba libre cocktails.

Highlights from the morning session included a reading of *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, by Pedro Juan Gutierrez, and a second discussion with Omar Montenegro. Mr. Gutierrez's book is being translated into Bulgarian and will be published in the spring of 2007. Mr. Montenegro's presentation focused on Cuban art and literature.

Cuba Libre Days in Plovdiv was a great success. At least two hundred people attended; most were young students. The event was promoted by a multifaceted campaign. Information about the event appeared in a local magazine and promotional material was distributed to language schools and other youth institutions. The event encouraged curiosity, aroused interest, and fostered solidarity between Bulgarians and Cubans living under Castro's regime. A brochure entitled *Cuba for Beginners* was published with interviews from Omar Lopez and Pedro Juan Gutierrez, and included a list of Cuba-related websites, the explanation of some unusual Cuban expressions (*Project Varela*, *Luchadores*, *Santeria*) and a CDR.

The exhibition continued through December 1, 2006, when a closing event took place. About 220 Leva (110 Euro, 140 USD) were raised for the families of Cuban political prisoners.

As a result of the event in Plovdiv, and with continuous help from the Pontis Foundation, a new Bulgarian NGO called cubalibre.bg has been established. On January 1, 2007, Bulgaria and Romania both became new members of the EU. Cuba related events in Romania are planned by the Pontis Foundation for the next year.

The Pontis Foundation's solidarity work on Cuba is carried out across Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Baltics. The foundation's main goal is to join active international societies with the oppressed civil society in Cuba and to offer humanitarian help to families of political prisoners. To support this, events and activities to raise public awareness of the issue of democracy and human rights in Cuba have been organized in Slovakia and other European countries with the goal of assembling a critical mass of NGOs, media, and politicians so that when political change finally takes place, in Cuba, Eastern Europe will be more involved and prepared to offer help.

Martin Pasiak, Pontis Foundation, Slovakia

CASE STUDY

MAKING A STATEMENT WHILE ON HOLIDAY: SUPPORTING THE INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES

Sanne Meijers

Pax Christi Netherlands encourages tourists to take books along to the independent libraries during their holiday on Cuba.

The idea behind it is very simple. We ask Dutch tourists to deliver Spanish books to the independent libraries, so as to strengthen these small but important information centers. But the campaign also raises the awareness of the tourists. For them, it is a way to get to know the other side of Cuban society, behind the façade of

salsa, rum and cigars. Before setting out on their trip to Cuba, tourists can obtain free Spanish books and materials from our organisation for the independent libraries. The range of topics on offer includes world literature, children's books, periodicals and academic works. Riskier genres, but ones that are more in demand are works on Cuban politics, human rights, democracy and political transition models in former communist countries. Once the innocent-looking tourists have been welcomed to the country, they

are at liberty to deliver the books to the independent libraries all across the island. We encourage tourists to deliver books outside Havana, because the more isolated libraries receive hardly any books.

This is one way in which our peace movement is stimulating democratization initiatives and defeating censorship on this communist island. In a society where self-censorship is necessary for self-preservation, books cover an important gap in the public



Cuban independent library El Mayor

domain. In a silenced society, books speak the words that cannot be uttered. Our hope is that this tourist campaign will open a hidden world on the way to a pluralistic and democratic Cuba.

What are the independent libraries exactly? They are the work of some eighty brave Cubans who complement the limited information supply on Cuba by opening their private book collections to neighbours and friends. They are a place where Cubans can lend books or read in peace, have discussions, take part in study groups and enjoy art exhibitions. Another objective is to help people form personal opinions. Some collections consist of only two book shelves.

When Pax Christi Netherlands started the campaign, we faced three major challenges. The process has been slow and difficult. Our first task was to collect Spanish books, despite our restricted budget. Obtaining books of this kind in a Dutch speaking society is something of a scouting expedition. Few academic books are written in Spanish, let alone on the subject of democratization initiatives and transition models of former communist countries in Eastern Europe. World literature is easier to obtain. Donations were received from libraries, universities, book stores and friendly NGO's such as People in Need. Our Spanish volunteer held a book collection campaign in her office in Spain. Dutch citizens can donate 15 euros to us for the acquisition of a book on Internet. They have the opportunity to choose their own title.

Secondly, we had to reach Dutch tourists and convince them to take books with them. Our approach was through tour operators that organize trips around Cuba. We convinced seven of them to include our brochure in the envelope with the ticket that they send to customers when they

book a trip to Cuba. We distributed the brochure to travel agencies and salsa schools, too. We also informed potential tourists about our campaign through special events, including lectures in libraries and book stores, photo exhibitions of the libraries, salsa demonstrations, debates and editorial articles. Dutch libraries may also adopt a Cuban independent library and install a permanent photo exhibition. We are currently working on establishing personal contacts with the Dutch travel guides who accompany tourists on the island.

Lastly, we had to convince the interested tourists that participation in our campaign posed no direct personal threat to them. With a small pile of books packed in their luggage, tourists are likely to pass through Cuban customs unhindered. The worst that can happen is that the books will be confiscated. However, this has happened only once so far, when a tourist took more than 40 books with him. On the other hand, the librarians do run considerable risks in managing their library. They face dangers such as confiscation of their book collection, expulsion, violent repercussions or even imprisonment. The combination of engaging in socio-political activities and being a librarian is a very dangerous mixture. The librarians emphasize how stimulating and important the international visits are for them by briefly relieving their isolated position. The visits themselves do not seem to harm the librarians.

To date, we have donated 550 books to the independent libraries. We would like to expand our campaign to other European countries with potential Cuban tourists. Our first choices are Spain and France, but we are still looking for suitable partners. This expansion will have a major impact. In addition, we are pursuing special deliveries to libraries linked to non-state education centres.

ISHR SUES CUBA AT THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) filed a complaint against the Republic of Cuba to the Human Rights Council. The Human Rights organization, based in Frankfurt, reproves in its complaint on the basis of the UN Resolution 1503 the Cuban legislation, arbitrary detentions, torture and unfair summary proceeding against civil rights activists and journalists criticizing the regime. Cuba, which has dictatorially been controlled by the Castro brothers for 48 years, is member of the 2006 newly established UN board, which replaced the Human Rights Commission.

The Human Rights Delegate of the Federal Government of Germany, Günter Nooke, wants the Federal Republic of Germany to use its EU presidency to gain the embassies' support for the oppositional Cuban democrats. The embassies should regularly contact representatives of the Cuban democratic movement. For example, representative should be invited to celebrative occasions like the national holiday commemorated by the embassies.

So far, no complaint against Cuba based on the 1503-procedure has been tried. According to the notion of the ISHR, who has stood up for the political prisoners on the Caribbean island since 1977, the Human Rights are systematically and persistently violated in Cuba.

More information at www.menschenrechte.de

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRACY IN CUBA: OBJECTIVES AND LATEST ACTIVITIES

Kristina Prunerová, ICDC Secretary

The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC) is a gathering of prominent politicians and intellectuals founded by former Czech President Václav Havel in reaction to the March 2003 crackdown against the democratic opposition in Cuba. Its aims are to promote democratic change within Cuba; to build global support for the Cuban opposition; and to alter the approach of European and western hemisphere countries towards Castro's government.

BACKGROUND

Among the members of ICDC are former presidents Patricio Aylwin Azócar, Chile; Armando Calderon Fournes, El Salvador; Vinicio Cerezo, Guatemala; Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Nicaragua; Eduardo Frei, Chile; Arpad Göncz, Hungary; Václav Havel, Czech Republic; Milan Kučan, Slovenia; Vytautas Landsbergis, Lithuania; Luis Alberto Lacalle, Uruguay; Rexhep Meidani, Albania; and Luis Alberto Monge Álvarez, Costa Rica. Among other politicians there are current President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves; Swedish Minister for European Affairs Cecilia Malmström; Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg; European Commissioner Ján Figel, Slo-

vakia; Member of House of Lords Baroness Caroline Cox, United Kingdom; members of parliaments Urban Ahlin from Sweden and Arnold Vaatz from Germany; former minister of foreign

To build global support for the Cuban peaceful and democratic opposition the ICDC has organized more than 10 public seminars and conferences in various European countries over the past three years.

affairs and current member of parliament Markus Meckel, Germany; member of the European parliament José Ribeiro e Castro from Portugal and Vice-president of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott from United Kingdom. Other distinguished members of ICDC are former prime ministers José María Aznar, Spain; Kim Campbell, Canada; Chang Chun-hsiung,

Taiwan; Philip Dimitrov, Bulgaria; Mart Laar, Estonia; and former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The democratic change in Cuba is also supported by former dissident and widow of Andrej Sacharov, Elena Bonner, from Russia and former Polish dissident and editor-in-chief of the daily Gazeta Wyborcza, Adam Michnik as well as writers Marcos Aguinis, Argentina; Enrique Krauze, Mexico; Mario Vargas Llosa, Peru; philosopher André Glucksmann, France; and Ferenc Köszeg, Hungary, president of Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

To promote democratic change within the country, the ICDC assists human rights initiatives in Cuba and the initiatives of independent civil society groups. These groups include the independent libraries movement, independent journalists, independent labor activists and opposition political movements. The ICDC secretariat also coordinates an international network of non-governmental organizations that have expressed solidarity with the democratic movement in Cuba

To build global support for peaceful and democratic Cuban opposition, the ICDC has organized more than ten public seminars and conferences in

various European countries over the past three years. The aim of these conferences is to bring public and political attention to the issues surrounding Cuba, drawing on the experiences of transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Latin America. In addition, ICDC members have supported numerous declarations, open letters and have signed articles published in the world media calling for more attention to the real situation in Cuba.

The secretariat of ICDC is based at the People in Need organization in the Czech Republic. It organizes the Committee's agenda and assists partner organizations in preparing their Cuba-related events. For more information see www.icdcprague.org.

LATEST ACTIVITIES

Open Letter to Raul Castro from ICDC members

In September 2006, ICDC members wrote an open letter to Raul Castro, temporary President of the Cuban Republic. Entitled "Transition, not Succession," the letter expresses concern about recent changes within the highest power structures in Havana and insists on the Cuban people's right to self determination through genuinely free elections.

The letter can be downloaded at www.icdcprague.org in the section News and Documents.

Cuba Transition to Democracy Summit held in Miami

On October 13, in Miami, a conference entitled the "Cuba Transition to Democracy Summit" gathered together current and former politicians from Latin America, Eastern Europe and the USA to express their support for democratic change in Cuba. The ICDC secretariat provided assistance by inviting some of the speakers, including one

of its members, Luis Alberto Lacalle, former president of Uruguay.

The event had three key objectives. First to highlight the recent initiative of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania and Slovenia in forming "**Friends of a Democratic Cuba**" to support democratic transition in Cuba. Second to identify specific ways to assist the Cuban pro-democracy movement by drawing on the transition experiences of Central and Eastern Europe. Lastly the summit provided the opportunity to assemble a broad cross-section of Cuban leaders to exchange ideas on points of convergence for accelerating democratic change in Cuba.

Participants in the summit, including Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Kinga Góncz and former Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Cyril Svoboda, pledged their ongoing support for Cuban political prisoners and activists working toward democratic change on the island. In his speech, ICDC member Luis Alberto Lacalle called for the creation of an economic recovery fund for a democratic Cuba. Recalling the boost given to Europe's ravaged post-war economies by the Marshall Plan, President Lacalle's call for a "Marti Plan" was favorably received by other speakers.

ICDC member Edward McMillan-Scott travels to Cuba and meets with the Ladies in White

On October 29, Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament, visited Havana and met privately with the Ladies in White movement, an association of mothers, wives and sisters of Cuban political prisoners. In December 2005, the movement received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Speech from the European Parliament but the Cuban authorities denied its members exit visas to travel to the ceremony. Dur-

ing his three-day trip, Mr. McMillan-Scott also met with opposition leaders Oswaldo Paya and Martha Beatriz Roque and expressed support for their struggle for democratic change and respect for human rights.

Mr. McMillan-Scott spoke about his experience from Cuba at a press conference held in Brussels in December 2006. For more please refer to his article in this issue.

ICDC "Virtual Embassy" to Latin America

Two ICDC members, Mr. Rexhep Mejdani, former president of Albania and Mr. Arnold Vaatz, German MP, participated in the "ICDC Virtual Embassy" to Latin America. The ICDC delegation was supported and accompanied by Laszlo Nagy, Slovak MP and the Slovak Parliament Human Rights Board Chairman. Between October 31, 2006 and November 11, 2006 the delegation visited Montevideo (Uruguay), Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). During the trip the delegation members participated in two conferences (Montevideo and Buenos Aires) and had many very important meetings with local authorities, politicians and intellectuals about the current situation in Cuba, support for Cuban democratic opposition and relations between Latin America countries and Cuba. The delegation members also gave their declaration to Latin-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Montevideo. In the declaration, they called for more support for the Cuban democratic opposition and for respecting *Viña del Mar Declaration* signed by Cuban representatives in 1996, which involved directing the Cuban regime to respect human rights.

The activity was organized in cooperation with Argentinean partner organization CADAL.

THE RIGHT TO HAVE A SAY

The Warsaw appeal to the EU and the governments of EU member states on Human Rights Day, December 10th, 2006

THE ERA OF CASTRO IN CUBA IS COMING TO AN END.

On the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we, the representatives of European civil initiatives and non-governmental organizations who support Cuban democrats and independent civil society on the island, have gathered in Warsaw, Poland, to call upon the governments of the European Union member states and the European Union institutions to promote political reform and transition to democracy in Cuba.

The decision about Cuba's future belongs solely to the Cuban people and should be decided by them under free and transparent procedures and must not be confined to the corridors of power both inside and outside the country. Cubans can no longer be the only Latin American people who are denied their sovereign and legitimate right to decide on their own leaders and political system.

In Europe, countries like Portugal, Spain, East Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia have only quite recently emerged as democratic states after decades of authoritarian rule. The transition to democracy

has been peaceful and prosperous for all these countries. This is a source of inspiration and hope for the Cuban people. At the same time, it implies a moral obligation for us, as Europeans, to actively support them in this transition process.

The EU should reach out, from the beginning, to the broad civic movement that, in recent years, has developed on the island. These people, many of whom have worked at the risk of their own lives, have proven themselves capable of designing and carrying out necessary reforms for future democracy and a just system of government.

We, the undersigned, want to stress to the European leaders the importance of addressing the civic movement as the main actor of change, although we do not exclude the possible participation of current public officials who demonstrate a serious commitment to a free society.

Cuban citizens are entitled to have their basic civil rights respected and to have a say in their own future. The continuation of one-party rule with the vague promise of gradual "economic reforms" by the Cuban regime is not acceptable. We urge the European

Union not to make itself co-responsible for such a development.

List of Signatories of Warsaw appeal to EU institutions and the governments of EU member states:

- » Igor Blazevic, People in Need, Czech Republic
- » Agnieszka Gratkiewicz, Lech Walesa Institute, Poland
- » Tomasz Pisula, Freedom and Democracy Foundation, Poland
- » Martin Pasiak, Pontis Foundation, Slovakia
- » Ivana Kullova, People in Peril Association, Slovakia
- » Anna-Lee Stangl, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Belgium
- » Liduine Zumpolle, Cuba Futuro, The Netherlands
- » Maria Luisa Bascur, Cuba Futuro, The Netherlands
- » Carmen Osorio, Asociacion Espanola Cuba en Transicion, Spain
- » Natalia Bellusova, Asociacion Iberoamericana por la Libertad, Spain
- » Aida Durut, International Society for Human Rights, Germany
- » Annette Förster, International Society for Human Rights, Germany
- » Antonio Stango, Italian Helsinki Committee and Hands off Cane, Italy



photo by Pavel Hrach

Malecón in Havana

NGO NETWORK EVENTS IN 2007

FEBRUARY

RELEASE OF A COMPLAINT TO THE UNITED NATIONS

The International Society for Human Rights (Germany) will release a detailed complaint against Cuba to the new Human Rights Council of the UN.

PHOTO EXHIBITION IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Organized by the Italian Helsinki Committee and Hands of Cain (Italy).

MARCH

SYMBOLIC PRISON CELL

Members of the NGO network will commemorate the 2003 crackdown on Cuban dissidents by symbolic cell on the city squares, a card campaign, a church mass in solidarity with the Ladies in White, and other actions.

APRIL

ICDC CONFERENCE IN BERLIN

For their second summit, ICDC members together with NGOs, MPs and MEPs, will discuss the common approach to Cuba by European Union, Latin America and United States.

EASTER CARD CAMPAIGN

PONTIS Foundation (Slovakia) and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (UK) will encourage people to send postcards to families of political prisoners.

FOLLOW UP EVENT TO ICDC CONFERENCE

Held in Madrid by *Asociación Iberoamericana por la Libertad*.

SPRING

PHOTO EXHIBITION "DISCOVER CUBA"

The International Society for Human Rights will try to reveal the real Cuba.

CONFERENCE "LATIN AMERICA – PERSPECTIVE AND CHALLENGES"

Organized by People in Peril Association, Slovakia.